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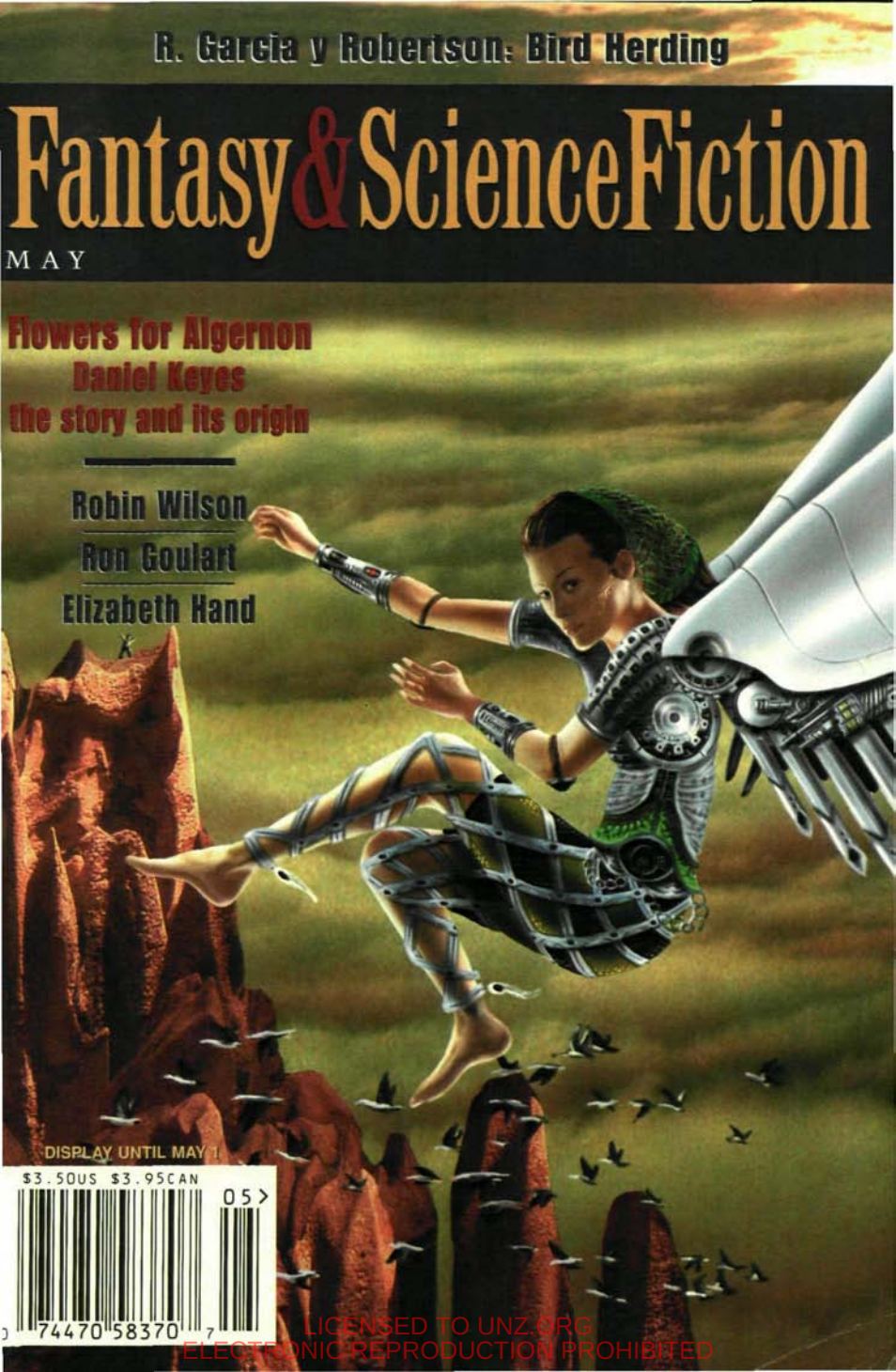

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Algernon, Charlie and I: A Writer's Journey

by Daniel Keyes

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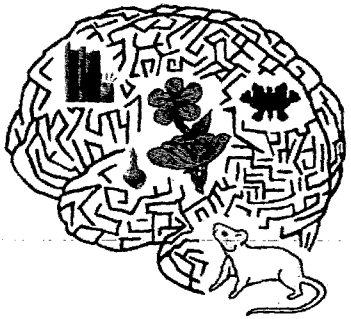

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Since we last heard from him back in October, Mr. Goulart has busily been working on such projects as a forthcoming collection of detective yarns entitled Adam and Eve on a Raft, *a new Groucho Marx mystery, and a big illustrated book entitled* Comic Book Culture *(a companion to Frank Robinson's* Pulp Culture*).*

Here he offers us a textbook example of how to get ahead in advertising. Who writes these textbooks anyway?

Black Magic for Dummies

By Ron Goulart

THE FIELD REPRESENTATIVE of the demon showed up exactly thirty days before Pete Whitlock's fifty-fifth birthday. He assumed human form for the visit, appearing as a handsome, tanned young man in his late twenties.

"How you doing, Pete?" he inquired just after materializing in the doorway of Pete's den at a few minutes after two on an overcast afternoon in late October.

Pete had been hunched at his computer keyboard, trying to beef up his resumé. "I've decided not to sell," he told the young man, looking up. "So if you're with one of the Realtors who still has the house listed, you can just — "

"Name's Chip Willis." The demon's rep held out a completely believable hand. "I'm not in real estate."

Getting up, Pete shook hands. "From the bank? They mentioned they were going to send somebody over about the equity loan," he said. "See, I've decided to keep the house for a while, borrow on it and hold on until I get the new advertising job I'm waiting for."

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"Good plan, Pete." Willis settled into the big brown armchair. "Won't make much difference in the long haul, but you may as well go out hopefully."

Frowning, Pete asked, "You aren't from the bank?"

"Nope, but it's a natural mistake." Willis smiled broadly. "I've got myself rigged to suggest something like that — sincerity, financial stability. Could be a lawyer, maybe an accountant. You know, someone people will trust, respect and believe in."

"Who in the hell are you then? Why did you walk right into my house?"

"Didn't walk in, sport," corrected the smiling Willis. "I materialized. You must've heard the faint popping sound. It's caused by the displacement of — "

"Great, wonderful. I don't have enough problems. Now I have a lunatic prowling my — "

"Keep cool, there's no problem. I'm not a loon, a serial killer or any other common suburban bugaboo."

"Go away," suggested Pete. "If you're a burglar, I have to tell you right off that — "

"Not a burglar either, no." His smile broadened. "Well, what say we get down to business?"

"What business? I don't, far as I know, have any impending business at all with a lunatic."

"Hey, Pete, you're not paying close enough attention here. Didn't I just assure you I wasn't a nutcake? Relax, listen to me now." A briefcase appeared suddenly on his lap, a brand new one made of real black leather. "Sorry, I forgot this."

Pete dropped down into his desk chair, turning to face Willis. "How'd you do that?"

"Impressive, huh? It's black magic." He unfastened the black case, reached inside. "But you ought to know all about that."

"All about black magic? Listen, Mr. Willis, I think maybe you — "

"Call me Chip."

"Chip, I'm commencing to think that you've got the wrong Peter Whitlock," he told him. "Maybe, you know, you want some other Peter Whitlock. Peter J. Whitlock, say, or Peter F. Whitlock or maybe — "

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"No, you're my boy, Pete." He extracted a rolled sheet of parchment. It was tied with a faded twist of red ribbon. "You remember this, don't you?"

"No, I can't say I do. What is it?"

Willis tapped his knee with the rolled parchment. "Let me refresh your memory," he offered. "Frisco. Thirty years ago. Well, thirty years less thirty days ago actually."

"Thirty years ago I was living out in San Francisco, yeah," he admitted, becoming aware of some twisting pains beginning deep in his stomach. "That was my first advertising job, with Arnold & Maxwell. I started there as a copywriter just before my twenty-fifth birthday. But I don't see what that has to do with — "

"It was there you began your impressive meteoric rise to success in your chosen profession."

"Meteoric?" Pete laughed ruefully. "I've been out of work for nearly five months. I never rose above copywriter with any of the five agencies I've worked with over the years. I'm living here in New Beckford, Connecticut, in a house that's dropped in value from $450,000 to maybe $375,000. I'm paying two vicious and vindictive former wives alimony and the last award I won was for some HoundDog Puppy Treat trade ads back in 1988." He shook his head slowly. "Success? You've definitely got the wrong Peter Whitlock, Chip."

"Let me clarify something," offered Willis, a trace of impatience sounding in his voice. "Because, see, lots of people I come to collect from try similar dodges. But, the point is, success is relative and everybody can't become a flapping billionaire. Even the most powerful demon in the netherworld can't go around turning everybody into a millionaire. Hell, that'd futz up the economy worse than it is already."

"Collect? What did you come to collect?"

"We'll get to that in a minute."

"And what was that reference to demons?"

"Oh, c'mon — are you pretending you never heard of Shug Nrgyzb?"

Pete scowled at his visitor. "What is it?"

"Shug Nrgyzb is who I work for."

"Not a very catchy name for a company."

"Shug Nrgyzb isn't a company or a product, Pete. He's a demon," explained Willis, waving the parchment. "A truly powerful one."

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"You're claiming you work for a demon?"

"I *do* work for a demon."

"You really are a loon. You'd just better leave my — "

"Whoa, whoa. Pete, I don't have all that much time to waste." Untying the ribbon, he unfurled the parchment. "The bottom line here is that you made a deal with Shug Nrgyzb thirty years back and now the time has come to settle the — "

"I never heard of him until just this minute," insisted Pete as he stood up again. "It's not the sort of name you'd forget. And, trust me, if I'd made any deal with a demon, granting that I'd ever believe in such a half-wit notion, I would sure as hell remember it."

Willis shook his head. "Been tried, pal."

"What's been tried?"

"Stupidity defense. 'I was too dense to know what I was doing.' Never works, not ever," the rep assured him. "Possibly in a court of law you could pull something like that and have a chance. But, hey, none of that cuts any ice with a demon."

Pete sat. "You're claiming that thirty years ago out in San Francisco I made some kind of deal with this Shug Nrgyzb?"

"You aren't pronouncing Nrgyzb right, Pete. It's Nrgyzb."

"Be that as it may, Chip — What was this deal I allegedly made?"

"In exchange for thirty years of uninterrupted success, you agree to — "

"You call what I've lived through for the past thirty years uninterrupted success? Do you have anything in your files on Mary Jo?"

"Your first wife, sure."

"How can any man who was married to Mary Jo for ten long, bleak years be considered a success?"

"You continue to miss the point, Pete. If you hadn't, see, made the deal things would've been even worse," the rep told him. "Success for a schlep like you doesn't involve sitting on top of the world for three decades. Nope, it means rather that you — "

"And then there was Mary Jane, my second wife."

"Were you aware that you have a tendency to marry women with similar names?"

"Yeah. But tell me what could have been worse than seven years with Mary Jane?"

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"Seven more with Mary Jo. It's all, I keep trying to convince you, relative. Believe me — you've had a much better life than you deserved."

"Do you know what my current bank balance is?"

"Checking or savings?"

"Savings."

"You have $11,426."

"Chip, we're in Fairfield County. People hereabouts give $11,426 to their cleaning ladies as a Christmas bonus, they often drop $11,426 into a homeless beggar's Styrofoam cup, they toss $11,426 to their kids for pocket money. $11,426, believe me, is not a fortune. It sure as hell is not an impressive amount to have to show for thirty damn years of wild success."

"For a born loser like you, Pete, it's about $10,000 more than you deserve." He rattled the parchment, at the same time making an impatient noise. "Back to the business at hand. It's our policy, as you know, to call on our clients thirty days in advance of the collection date. That way, Pete, you have time to put your affairs in order, maybe arrange a farewell party, do those things you've always been meaning to do and, being such a schlep, never got around to doing."

"Wait now." He was on his feet again. "This isn't the old hokey business where you come to collect my soul?"

"No, it is not, nope." Willis grinned. "All Shug Nrgyzb wants is your life."

"Life?"

"On your fifty-fifth birthday he'll appear and devour you."

Pete sank, slowly, back into his desk chair. "What exactly does being devoured by Shug Nrgyzb involve?"

"Painless really. Being as how he's on the large side, he can devour the average person in two bites. Three tops," promised Willis. "Some folks get panicky when they witness the flames and smoke that accompany a manifestation of Shug Nrgyzb, but that's all for show. You might, possibly, experience a few first degree burns, but you'll only be alive for a few seconds after that anyway."

"Listen, Chip, I never made any deal with this guy," insisted Pete. "So it really doesn't seem fair, particularly since I never actually got the thirty years of dazzling success, for him to come and devour me. I'm sure that if you point out the mistake to him, he'll be only too glad to — "

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"Actually, Shug Nrgyzb has a reputation for being a real shit, Pete," Willis pointed out. "He could drop by and devour you merely for the fun of it. Yet that's a moot point, since you did actually sign this document." He paused, scanning the parchment. "Oops."

"Ha! It isn't me you want at all, is it?"

"Oh, it's you sure enough. No doubt about that, Pete." He held out the parchment. "You see, the way this works is that the party who enjoys the success is the one who has to pay the piper. In this particular instance, however, you didn't personally sign yourself up for the thirty year success package. That was — "

"Jennifer Windmiller." He'd grabbed the illuminated agreement and was frowning at the signature at the bottom.

"Old girlfriend of yours, as I understand it."

"Jennifer Windmiller," Pete repeated softly as he let the parchment drop to the carpet. "I haven't thought of her for years."

Willis rose up, smoothing his trousers. "Well, you owe all the great things that have happened to you during your adult life to that little lady," he said, smiling. "We won't see each other again, but it's been nice meeting you. Oh, and don't try to run when Shug Nrgyzb shows up to collect. That would only make him madder and he'd probably devour you in smaller bites."

There was a faint popping noise as Willis, his briefcase and the parchment all vanished.

ZORINA TASHLIN reached across the desk to brush at his left coat sleeve. "Lint," the thin dark woman mentioned. "Perhaps your long stretch of unemployment, Peter, is due as much to your slovenly appearance as it — "

"One speck of fuzz doesn't qualify me as a slob," he countered. "But let's get back to my latest problem."

She picked up her pencil, set it down an inch to the right of where it had been. "I'm a career consultant, not a therapist."

"No, no, I'm not cracking up," he assured her. "It's simply that I seem to be mixed up, through no fault of my own, with a vindictive demon."

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"Perhaps if you accepted responsibility for your problems, you'd — "

"The reason I came by this afternoon, Zorina, is that I need some advice about how to — "

"If you honestly believe that this old sweetheart of yours has put a curse on you, then she's the one you must talk to."

"It's not exactly a curse, it was supposed to be a boon. Thirty years of ongoing achievement, except it didn't turn out quite that way. But then what can you expect from a nitwit like Jennifer Windmiller?"

"Why don't you simply contact her, Peter?"

"I tried that, soon as the demon's advance man vanished," he answered. "Trouble is, she's not listed anywhere in the San Francisco Bay Area, not according to phone information. And I used the Net every way I could think of and didn't find one damn trace of her."

"Probably she's married."

"Maybe, more than once. I don't have any idea, however, what her name is these days."

"Finding lost loves is not part of my service. But a good private investigator might be able to — "

"That will take too long," he cut in. "But you advise a lot of people on career changes, help them find new jobs. Do you know anybody who specializes in occult stuff? I want to approach the problem from the demon angle, but unfortunately there's nothing like an occult investigator listed in the yellow pages."

Turning, Zorina gazed out the office window at the gray late afternoon parking lot. "Well, I suppose there is Batsford."

"What does he do?"

"Mostly Batsford fouls up the job interviews I send him out on," she said, picking up the pencil again. "He maintains that, in addition to being a second rate accountant, he's an investigator of the supernatural. Mind you, Peter, I can't vouch for the validity of such a claim."

"Basically I need someone who's knowledgeable about warding off demons. Or at least stalling them for a while."

"Check with Batsford." She wrote an address on a memo slip. "His phone's not in service at the moment. And don't, by the way, give him any cash in advance. He has a tendency to go off on sprees."

Taking the slip, Pete studied the address before folding it and

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inserting it in his shirt pocket. "Long as I'm here — have you got anything new for me in the way of a job?"

"I hesitate to send you out on any more interviews, Peter, if you plan to be eaten by a demon in a month's time."

"If Batsford is any good at all, I'll have longer than that."

"You'll have to guarantee me you're going to be alive for at least a year."

"C'mon, that's not fair, Zorina. Nobody can guarantee you that they'll live another year."

"That's true, yes, but none of my other clients has a fiend from the netherworld breathing down his or her neck."

"What about that copywriting job for Help-A-Tot? You mentioned there might be an opening there about now."

"It's beneath you, Peter."

"Five months I've been out of work."

"I wasn't aware of the exact nature of the position when I brought it up the other day." She tapped the eraser end of the pencil on the desk. "Help-A-Tot collects money for underprivileged children around the world. Each child is supposed to write a letter to his or her individual sponsor every three months. Alas, Help-A-Tot isn't as aboveboard about those letters as I was originally led to believe. It turns out they're faked, all written by the same person and then mailed by stringers across the globe. The Help-A-Tot copywriter is the person who has to crank out those fraudulent missives. It's disgusting."

"Disgusting," he agreed. "But what does it pay?"

She rose up, carefully, frowning. "Clean up this demon mess first," she advised. "Then we can talk jobs again, Peter."

"That's not a crystal ball," observed Pete.

"Yes, it is."

"Looks like a fishbowl to me."

"If it were a fishbowl, my skeptical chum, there'd be a myriad of colorful little fish flitting around inside it," said Batsford.

"You've got it upside down, so all the fish would've dribbled out long since."

"Who's the occult expert, my boy — you or I?"

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"Well, Zorina claims that you are, though I'm starting to have — "

"And how much am I charging you for this entire lengthy session?"

"Fifty dollars."

"That's an incredibly low fee, my boy, considering that you're getting my exclusive and undivided services." He was a small, rumpled man in his middle forties, wearing a double-breasted blue suit and a white sweatshirt.

The questionable crystal ball rested on a card table in the center of the small, cluttered living room of his second-floor apartment.

"I'm skeptical that any of this," admitted Pete, who was sitting opposite the mystic, "is going to work."

"I must have silence while I'm trying to tune in on the supernatural realms."

"Is that what you're supposed to be doing? What exactly will that have to do with warding off a demon?"

Batsford scratched at his left armpit. "I may go off into a trance any time now," he warned. "Should I say nothing for a full five minutes, my boy, reach across and give me a hearty nudge. Trances sometimes, unfortunately, segue into naps." He placed his stubby hands, fingers spread wide, on each side of the upended fishbowl. "Om mani padme hum."

A loud thumping sounded in the dimlit room.

"Is that," inquired Pete, "something mystical?"

"Merely the young marrieds upstairs wrestling with each other. Ignore it." Batsford shut his eyes. "Om mani padme hum."

The crystal ball began to glow with a pale yellow light. A tiny figure appeared within it.

Leaning forward, squinting at the image, Pete exclaimed, "Hey, that's Jenny Windmiller. Except she looks exactly as she did when I was dating her out in San Francisco thirty some years ago. I remember those tacky lovebeads."

"There's sometimes a little fine tuning that has to be done," said Batsford in a gruffer voice. "Let's fast forward to the present."

Jennifer went through a series of changes, her slim figure growing gradually plumper and her dark hair undergoing various style changes and ending up short-cropped and gray. Her clothes changed, too, and finally she appeared within the globe clad in a full-length fur coat.

"That can't be her."

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"Time has a tendency to blur the — "

"No, I mean she's a vegetarian. A fur coat — looks like mink, doesn't it? — is something Jenny'd never put on."

"Ah — ah." Batsford suddenly slumped in his folding chair. His voice shifted again and he began talking in a piping falsetto. "Her name now is Jennifer Sanson. She resides in Santa Morgana, California."

"That's over in Marin County, across the Bay from San Francisco." He leaned closer to the crystal. "Can you give me an address and a phone number?"

"Look it up in the directory, schmuck," the piping voice advised him. "It's possible she can re-negotiate the contract with Shug Nrgyzb, although she hasn't practiced any black magic for many a..." Sighing, Batsford came toppling forward. His head whacked the fish bowl, sending it hopping off the table.

Pete lunged, caught it before it smacked the bare hardwood. It felt extremely hot in his hands.

"Nice catch." Batsford had his own voice once more. He was sitting up, rubbing at his eyes. "Did we find out anything?"

"Don't you know?"

He shook his shaggy head. "I was in a trance during the best parts. Did we?"

"According to you, Jennifer is now — "

"Not according to me, my boy. According, rather, to one of my valuable controls. Was it a kindly Southern gent who — "

"Sounded more like Mickey Mouse."

"Ah, that's Little Eva. A sweet child, though a mite salty."

"Is she reliable?"

"Almost always, yes."

"Well, she claims Jenny is now a Mrs. Sanson and residing in Northern California."

"You can put your faith in Little Eva, bless her."

"Okay, I'll check with information and get Jennifer's phone number," said Pete, getting up. "I'll phone her and tell her to do something to call off Shug Nrgyzb."

"You *must* go out there in person." Standing, Batsford scratched at his backside.

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"What do you mean?"

"Eh?"

"You told me I have to go out there to California."

When Batsford frowned, new wrinkles joined those already crowding together on his pale forehead. "What sort of voice did I use?"

"Sounded like your own."

"Ah, that must be Mr. Dennison. I'm told he sounds a great deal like me." He rubbed at his stubbly chin several times, slowly. "I'd heed Dennison were I you. He has an impressive track record in this sort of thing."

"Look, if Jennifer is still capable of calling off this demon, she doesn't need me out there. With my finances the way they are, a trip West would be — "

"It's essential that you confront her face to face," cried Batsford in Little Eva's voice. "And, please, take nice Mr. Batsford along for occult protection." He blinked, shook his head. "Who spoke to you this time?"

Pete eyed him. "Have you been wishing for a vacation out in California?"

"No, absolutely not. I loathe the place. Far too much sunshine and the whole state is due to fall into the sea any day now. Hate California, my boy."

Pete shook his head. "Never mind, thanks for your help." He moved toward the door. "I'll get in touch with Jennifer and — Hey!" Several drops of warm water had smacked him on the head. He glanced upwards. "Couple upstairs?"

"After they grapple, they take a shower together." He shuffled across the room to open the door. "Let me know when we're leaving for the Coast."

Three nights later Pete was getting wet on a rainswept hillside in Santa Morgana, California. Far below, beyond the houses and the wooded acres, the San Francisco Bay showed blurred and black. The lights of the restaurants and the docked boats of this little bayside town glowed fuzzily.

Pete was standing beside their rented car, shining a flashlight at the silent engine. "Why am I doing this?" he asked. "I don't know a damn thing about automobiles."

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"Doesn't look too complicated, my boy," observed Batsford, who was hunched next to him and using a steepled copy of the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a rain shield.

"And you — what kind of mystic are you? Couldn't you or one of those pixies you claim you're in communication with have foreseen this?"

"Spirits," corrected the occult consultant. "I get most of my psychic help from the ghosts of the departed who — nertz to you, kiddo." The last phrase came out in a falsetto. "Now, now, Little Eva."

"Why in the hell didn't somebody like Little Eva predict that this car we rented was going to break down?"

"I did mention at the time," reminded Batsford, "that a firm calling itself the Rockbottom Cheap Car Rental Agency might not deal in the most reliable of vehicles."

"We're on a very tight budget," Pete told him as he probed with the beam of the flash. "Having to pay your way out here means I can't go first cabin on everything. Is that red wire supposed to be dangling there?"

"That looks more like a strand of spaghetti. Perhaps the last mechanic to service this rattletrap was snacking whilst he — "

"Jinxed. This whole venture is jinxed," lamented Pete. "If only I'd been able to talk to Jennifer on the phone I could've avoided this entire trip — and the cost."

"It occurs to me that her husband's refusal to allow you telephone access to the lady is highly suspicious."

"He said she was down with the flu. Not a very cordial guy from the sound of him."

"Contractors are usually aggressive burly types. Besides, you called the house something like a dozen times demanding to speak to her."

"Listen, Batsford, I'm going to be devoured by this demon in twenty-seven days. That would make anybody anxious and uneasy."

"Whap the carburetor," advised the mystic in a vaguely Germanic voice. "We'll fix der dodgosted thing dot way."

"Hum?"

Batsford blinked. "Did I speak?"

"You told me to hit the carburetor — in a lousy Dutch accent."

"Oh, that was Mr. O'Riley. For some reason, it amuses him to pretend he's a Nordic type," explained Batsford as the rain pelted down on his

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newspaper. "During his lifetime, he worked in a garage in Minneapolis. It wouldn't hurt to heed his advice."

Sighing, Pete leaned further under the raised hood and fisted something he was nearly certain was the carburetor.

The engine returned to life.

Pete waited for a few seconds, grinned, shut the hood and jumped back in the driver's seat. "C'mon, let's go."

WHEN PETE stepped into the second-floor bedroom off the rainswept balcony, Jennifer said, "You're getting mud all over the carpet, Peter."

"Same old Jenny," he said. "You husband's locked you in here and I, after coming westward from distant Connecticut at considerable expense, have just climbed up a very rickety drain pipe to rescue you and all you can say by way of greeting is — "

"Is Connecticut where you live now? I was thinking of trying to get in touch with you." She looked even plumper than she had in the mystic's low-grade crystal ball. Wearing a loose flowered dress, she was sitting on the edge of a large spool bed. "You wouldn't happen to have anything like a fig newton or a granola bar with you, I suppose?"

"No, nope."

"Oliver — that's Oliver Sanson, my present husband — has been keeping me on a terribly skimpy diet," she explained. "How, by the way, did you know I was locked up here in my bedroom?"

He moved nearer the bed. "Little Eva."

"That's your wife, is it?"

"No, she's one of Batsford's contacts in the spirit world and she — "

"Oh, you're not messing with mediums and sorcerers, are you?" She shook her head. "That's a terrible hobby. I wouldn't have anything to do with that sort of — "

"Too bad you didn't feel that way in your wild youth, Jenny — when you made your damned deal with Shug Nrgyzb."

"That's pronounced Nrgyzb," she corrected. "And, listen, Peter, I really do feel awfully bad about that. In fact, that's why I'm a sort of prisoner in my own home right now." She glanced down at his wet trousers and noticed that the knee was torn out of one leg. "I bet Rollo took

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a nip at you. Or was it Bosko?"

"The bigger of the two police dogs — he didn't introduce himself." He rubbed at his knee. "Batsford had both those beasts hypnotized and then Little Eva took over to tell us your husband was out and that you were locked up here."

"Yes, tonight's Oliver's poker night."

Dropping into a fat pink armchair facing the big bed, he said, "Get back to how my impending role as snack food for a demon from the netherworld inspired your husband to stow you away."

"You don't have anything of a sweet nature with you? Something with a peanut butter center would be especially welcome about — "

"In a little over three weeks, Jenny, Shug Nrgyzb is going to pop up — amidst, as it's been explained to me, considerable fire and brimstone — and snarf me down. So let's forget about other sorts of eating experiences for now."

"I'm truly sorry about this," the plump gray-haired woman assured him. "At the time I only thought how nice it would be if you had a rich, happy life."

"Rich, happy and short."

"Thirty years, my gosh, it seemed like a heck of a long time back then, Peter," she said. "And you have had a pretty happy and successful life, haven't you? I was disappointed that I've never seen anything about you in *Time* or *Fame* or even the *National Intruder*, but I told myself yours was probably a quieter sort of success, out of the limelight."

"We'll go into that later," he said, impatient. "Tell me how your husband fits into my problem."

"Well, I couldn't exactly remember when your birthday was," she said. "We lost touch an awfully long time ago. But, I don't know, I started to get the feeling that it was getting close and that thirty years had gone by. I hadn't told you what I'd done then because I thought we'd be together forever and ever and I wanted it to be a surprise." She sighed, looking up at the pink ceiling. "It occurred to me the other day that I should find out where you were and give you a ring."

"'Hello, Pete, a big green monster's going to gobble you up on your birthday. Bye.'"

"Anyway, Peter, I decided to talk the situation over with Oliver."

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"Doesn't the guy know about your dabbling in black magic?"

"Oh, as I told you, I gave all that up years and years ago. Right after I quit smoking pot and a couple husbands before this one." She shook her head. "Oliver is a very successful contractor here in Northern California. Well, he's about $900,000 in the hole right now, but that's not too bad. He's going to bid on building the new Marin County ArtPlex. That's that mall sort of thing where they'll have an opera house and a ballet stage and a theater-in-the-round and all sorts of gourmet restaurants and exotic souvenir shops and — "

"Why'd he lock you up?"

"Because I wouldn't go along with what he wanted," she replied. "He wasn't at all interested in your impending doom, Peter, but he was most anxious that I summon up this demon for him."

"He wanted to make a deal with Shug Nrgyzb to make sure he got the contract to build this thing?"

She nodded, sniffling some. "That's it exactly, yes," she said. "He hopes to get inside information on the bids and try to guarantee that he'll be the one chosen to build the ArtPlex."

"You refused."

She shuddered, hugging herself. "I told him it was much too dangerous," she said. "I simply don't want to mess with black magic ever again."

He left the chair and stood over her. "But you could summon up this demon?"

"I suppose," she said slowly, not looking at him. "I'd have to dig up my old magic books and — "

"Where are the books, Jenny?"

"That's exactly what Oliver wants to know." Sighing, she shuddered again. "He says he's going to keep me locked away until I give in, go get the books and arrange an interview with the demon."

"Are the books hidden here somewhere?"

"Course not. I'm pretty certain they're stored up in Aunty Bunny's attic someplace."

He frowned, thoughtful. "I remember her. That's the one who lives over in the Berkeley hills, isn't it, in that tumble-down Victorian place?"

"Poor Aunty Bunny's been dead nearly five years and the house's been locked up for the past two or three."

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"You can get in?"

"I have a key, sure," she admitted. "But, really, I think it's too risky to try summoning up Shug Nrgyzb."

"Maybe, but we have to talk to him," he told her evenly. "You're going to convince him that I'm a dupe in this whole mess. And we'll persuade him to cancel the deal."

"He's not a very amiable demon."

"So I've been told. But we have to try to get him to be reasonable." He took hold of one of her plump arms and lifted her to her feet. "C'mon, Jenny, you owe me this."

After a moment she said, "Okay, all right. I'll make a try at it."

BATSFORD SNEEZED. "The dust lies thick upon these ancient tomes," he remarked and sneezed again.

The three of them were up in the dim-lit attic of the three-story Victorian house high in the hills of Berkeley. Thunder was rumbling outside and a chill night wind was rattling the shutters and trim that the old place was thick with.

Jennifer, squatting beside an open steamer trunk, was leafing through a thick volume bound in yellowish leather. With her other hand she was eating fig newtons from the big box they'd stopped to buy at a 24-hour supermarket en route.

"Could you, Jenny, maybe refrain from snacking and concentrate on this spell?" mentioned Pete.

"Relax, I've just now found it." After wiping crumbs off her chin, she pointed to a foxed page midway through the hefty volume.

Batsford tilted his head so he could read the title on the spine. "*The Compleat Evil Spells of the Infamous Count Monstrodamus.*" He nodded, frowning. "A notorious sorcerer in his day."

"And he wrote up some terrific spells." Jennifer placed the open book on the dusty attic floor. "We might as well do the whole business right here. No use messing up any of the rooms."

"How mess up?" asked Pete.

"When a fiery demon shows up, there's often smoke damage," she said. "Right now, I need some magic chalk."

"Here you go, dear lady." From a rumpled pocket in his rumpled

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jacket, Batsford produced a stub of bright yellow chalk and presented it to Jennifer.

"Thanks. Now, you guys, push enough boxes aside so that I can have a clear space about six feet across."

Pete was leaning against a stack of large cardboard boxes. He straightened up and started hefting them out of the way.

Lightning crackled outside and the single window in the slant-ceilinged attic glowed an electric blue for a few seconds.

Jennifer ate another fig newton.

When sufficient space was available, she drew, on her hands and knees, a large pentagram on the raw wood flooring.

"Little lopsided," observed Batsford, who was sitting in an old bentwood rocker against a wall.

"It'll do." Jennifer stood up, panting some. She bent and gathered up the book of Count Monstrodamus's spells. "Maybe you better hunker down behind something at first, Peter. If he sees you right off — well, he may just devour you and the heck with waiting until your birthday."

"That would be violating the halfwit agreement."

"Even so."

Pete moved behind a stack of old suitcases, a spot from which he couldn't even see the pentagram.

He could hear Jennifer commence to read aloud from the magic book. It sounded as though it was in what he imagined was Middle English, interspersed with phrases in French.

She droned on for about three minutes and then sneezed several times. Next came an echoing thump.

He risked a look.

Jennifer was squatting on the floor, picking up the fallen magic book.

"Was that part of the ritual — the sneezing?" he inquired.

"No, it's all the damn dust up here. Now go hide again."

He complied.

"Rats," muttered Jennifer. "I lost my place. Jeez, I guess I better start over again."

Pete emerged again. "Won't that screw things up?"

"Hush, quit heckling."

"Can't you just pick up where you left off? That would probably be

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less risky and involve less chance of — "

"Possibly, but I don't *remember* where I left off. It's safer, when summoning up fiends from the nether regions, to get in every word of the spell."

"Okay, you're the expert." He hunkered down out of sight once more.

"I haven't done any of this stuff for years, remember? Quit interrupting and I'll give it another try," she suggested. "You weren't such a fussbudget when we were romantically involved."

"I wasn't on any demon's menu back then."

"Kids, quit this squabbling," put in Batsford. "Let's get on with the ritual."

Pete sighed, shrugged, and hunched down further.

When Jennifer sneezed again, Pete didn't peek again or say anything.

She got through the entire spell on the second try, stumbling on just one phrase — which might've been in Ancient Persian — and only sneezing twice.

Gradually all outside sounds started to fade and an immense silence filled the attic.

Then Pete became aware of an odd humming noise. It sounded like dozens of people having a violent argument, only very far away.

The room was growing increasingly hot, too.

"Well, rash mortal — now what?"

The voice sounded like the sort of voice a cement mixer would have if it developed the ability to speak. And it seemed to be coming from several places at once.

Very slowly, and carefully, Pete started inching his head toward the edge of the barrier of suitcases.

Thick yellow smoke was billowing all around.

"I have summoned you," began Jennifer in a pale, nervous voice, "I have summoned you, O Mighty Shug Nrgyzb, so that I might humbly — "

"I'm usually addressed," the demon informed her, "as O Mighty Exalted and Incomparable Shug Nrgyzb. And you're mispronouncing Nrgyzb."

"I'm frightfully sorry and I offer an abject apology, O Mighty Exalted and Incomparable Shug Nrgyzb," she said, voice shaky. "I don't know if you remember me, but — "

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"You are Jennifer Windmiller. I never forget someone with whom I have made a binding and unbreakable contract."

Pete risked a look from behind the suitcases.

The demon was quite tall and his head, or what passed for his head, was up near the beamed attic ceiling. He was a muddy shade of green and had lumps and knobs and scales and something that looked like mildew all over his huge body. Although it didn't seem likely you could pick up mildew in a place that was as hot as the netherworld was rumored to be. Yellow smoke was fuming out of his mouth and nose and what might be his ears.

"It's about that very contract," said Jennifer, "that I want to have a chat." She shut the book but kept her plump finger in it as a bookmark. "You see, O Mighty and Incomparable Shug Nrgyzb, I — "

"You left out Exalted. Things like that really annoy me," rumbled the green demon.

"Right. Well, the point is it was I who made the deal with you and not the person who reaped the benefits. So it isn't exactly fair to make him now pay for — "

"Don't I know that? You were merely the novice sorcerer who did the negotiating," said the demon. "Why don't you come out and join us, Peter?"

Pete swallowed twice before stepping out from behind the stack of suitcases. "Hi," he said as he came into the open. "I sure hope we can work this out."

"We have a saying in the netherworld," Shug Nrgyzb told him. "A deal is a deal."

"Just a moment," put in Batsford.

The demon didn't bother to look back at the rocking chair that the mystic was sitting in. "Don't intrude," he advised.

Pete said, "What we're trying to get across to you, sir, is that I never personally had anything to do with — "

"What did I tell you people to call me?"

"O Mighty Exalted and Incomparable Shug Nrgyzb," said Pete. "Okay, let's get back to my — "

"So you can't summon up a flapping demon to save your own husband from going down the toilet. No, but for this simp you whip up a big fat ugly

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green one." A large tan man in a conservative gray business suit had come running up the stairs to the attic and he charged through the doorway now.

"Oliver, how'd you know I was at Aunty Bunny's?"

"As fate would have it, Jen, I was driving home from my card game — where I lost a flapping $1200 — just as you and these two schmucks were racing away," said Oliver Sanson. "Assuming you were up to no good, I followed."

"Cease," boomed the demon, producing an extra volume of smoke. "Who is this vile intruder?"

"Vile intruder my ass." Oliver faced him, hands on hips. "I'll get to you in a minute. First, though, I want to get something straight with my devoted wife here. Honey, you — "

"No one," roared the demon, "speaks disrespectfully to Shug Nrgyzb."

"Hey, hold on a minute," said Sanson. He took a few more steps toward his wife. "Is this the guy who can...what's wrong, Jen?"

She was shaking her head vigorously and pointing at the demon.

Sanson started to turn around just as a large green paw scooped him up.

Peter sprinted to Jennifer's side and took hold of her head. "Time to leave."

"But he's going to devour Oliver."

"You can't stop him."

"True," she acknowledged.

As they started down the wooden stairs to the landing, Pete heard a large chomping sound and then a scream.

Then a piping little voice said, "Hey, you big bozo, what do you think you're doing?"

Pete and Jennifer kept running.

Returning to the red plastic seat next to Pete, Batsford said, "You really cannot, my boy, get a good cup of cappuccino in an airport."

Pete was sitting with his hands resting on his knees, staring out at the gray day beyond the waiting room windows. A massive airliner went roaring up into the afternoon. "You're sure everything is going to work out?"

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"Thanks to Little Eva," said the mystic. "She really has a knack for negotiating with demons."

"She shouldn't have talked him out of devouring Jennifer's husband. Sanson deserved to be gobbled up, the bastard."

"Think of the problems the dear lady would've had trying to explain what had happened to him if Shug Nrgyzb had eaten up the simp in his entirety."

"I suppose."

"And her hubby's experiences with that fire-breathing critter drove all thoughts of making any sort of deal with a demon from his pea brain for good and all."

Pete watched another plane go climbing up into the sky. "But listen, if Little Eva's so terrific at networking with demons, how come she didn't get him to cancel our deal?"

Batsford took a sip from his paper cup. "I think we made a pretty good deal, all things considered," he said. "Instead of devouring you in the early hours of your birthday this year, he graciously extended your contract for another thirty years."

"That's going to be great when he shows up at the old folks home to collect."

"Look on the bright side," advised Batsford after another sip. "You also get thirty more years of fabulous success."

Pete sighed. "Yeah, I'm really looking forward to that," he said.

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Books To Look For

CHARLES DE LINT

Mendoza in Hollywood, by Kage Baker, Harcourt Brace & Co., 2000, $23.

IT TOOK ME longer than usual to read Kage Baker's latest novel, *Mendoza in Hollywood*, the third in her "Novel of the Company" series. Not because it's a bad book. It isn't. There are all sorts of interesting things going on in it. But the book is slow going since it takes about two thirds of the way through before much of a plot kicks in.

Let me backtrack a moment to explain.

"The Company" referred to in the book's subtitle is Dr. Zeus Incorporated. When they discovered the secret of time travel, it opened up all sorts of commercial possibilities. But there were complications as well. The time travel only works backwards, then forward again to your point of departure in your present. History can't be changed and you can't bring anything back with you.

The Company solved this by establishing indestructible warehouses in the past, stocking them with the treasures they acquired and utilizing an immortal workforce of cyborgs that are created at the dawn of time and have to live through the ages, day by day.

One of these cyborgs is the botanist Mendoza, previously introduced in the novels *In the Garden of Iden* and *Sky Coyote*. Like her peers, she appears to be human, but with her implants, abilities, and immortality, is anything but.

This time Mendoza is assigned to a stagecoach inn just outside of what will one day be Los Angeles. The Civil War is raging to the east and the City of Angels is a desert inhabited by cutthroats and fortune-seekers. There are a number of other cyborgs assigned to the same area, a motley crew of fascinating personalities, and Baker spends much of

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the first half of the book delving into their characters and interactions with one another. We're provided with a great deal of history of the area and of the filmmaking business that will one day be its primary business, given tours of where landmarks will be in the future and of the strange occurrences in some of them.

The group at the inn also watch a number of classic films which Baker delves into with great detail, the various characters commenting on and explaining elements of what's taking place on the screen.

It's all quite fascinating, but since there really isn't a story for a while, one can almost read it like nonfiction — dipping into the book, enjoying a chapter or two, then setting it aside to read something with a bit more of a plot. I know this sounds negative and I don't mean it to. That first half to two thirds of *Mendoza in Hollywood* does make for an engrossing, if desultory, reading experience.

Throughout the earlier sections we see that Mendoza has been having dreams/nightmares about her first true love who died in England about three hundred years earlier. When what could be his reincarnation finally shows up in the form of an English spy, that's when the plot kicks in and events begin to move in a more traditional fashion. From that point on, I read the remainder of the book in one satisfying sitting.

Mendoza in Hollywood works well as a stand-alone novel and will appeal to anyone with an interest in the Old West, the movie business, the Civil War, sf conspiracies, speculations on immortality, the romantic spirit...well, as you can see, there's probably something in there for everyone. And perhaps what seemed slow going to me won't feel at all the same to you.

Prospero's Children, by Jan Siegel, Voyager, 1999, £12.99.

It starts in an art gallery in London, where we're introduced to sixteen-year-old Fern Capel, about as down-to-earth a young woman as one could meet, and it ends in Atlantis. In between is a long sojourn in a mysterious house on the Yorkshire moors where, along with Fern, we watch the layers of mystery that lie over the world slowly fray and come apart, revealing impossible wonders and dangers.

Fern's father inherited the house from a distant relative, a sea captain, and the three of them — widowed father, Fern, and her younger brother Will — plan to

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spend the children's summer holidays in Yorkshire, getting the old house ready to sell.

At first it seems to be a gloomy place to spend the summer, but Fern and Will are soon caught up in its mysteries. There are the night visits of a snuffling creature outside their bedroom windows; the watcher, Ragginbone, a mysterious traveler who sometimes appears to be a stone on a hill overlooking the house, sometimes a man; the feral dog who becomes their protector; the masked motorcyclist, haunting the roads and lanes nearby; the house's depressed and shy brownie....

And then there's the missing key for which everyone seems to be looking. What does the key open? Ah, that would spoil the surprise.

But what I can tell you is that Siegel has penned a fresh and innovative take on many of the tropes of the fantasy novel. Her characters are variously engaging, mysterious, and deadly. The settings, from moody Yorkshire to the glories of Atlantis, are wonderfully realized. And happily, she keeps us guessing throughout the story. From the malicious strategies of Alison Redmond, an art galley employee who is obviously using Fern's father for her own purposes, through the revelation of what the key unlocks and what lies beyond it, there's a vigor and intrigue to all the twists and turns of the plot.

I can't tell you how heartened I am whenever I find writers such as James Stoddard *(The High House,* reviewed last May), and now Jan Siegel. They bring to an increasingly moribund marketplace stories that are refreshingly original, yet still have a foot in the mythological past, re-creating the wonder and joy that spoke to so many of us when we first read what are now considered to be classics of the field.

Prospero's Children is an utter joy, a treasure worth many rereadings.

An American edition will be available this October from Del Rey.

The False House, by James Stoddard, Warner Aspect, 2000, $6.50.

And speaking of James Stoddard, he weighs in with a return to the characters and setting of *The High House* with somewhat mixed results. The bad news is that his wonderful creation, the High House of the first book's title, no longer feels as fresh and innovative as it did the first time out. That first

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book was a glorious read — a real delight, especially to those of us who remember the classics by Dunsany, Morris, Peake, Hodgson, and their like. And the house itself was every bit as rich as the creations to be found in those classic novels: an enormous structure, sort of a microcosm reflecting the universe, with rooms and halls and stairwells beyond count. It's a place that can take months to travel through, with strange and enchanting elements on every side, from a dragon in the attic to feral furniture.

In *The False House*, the villains from the first novel have returned to steal the cornerstone of the High House and also kidnap a young woman. Using the two — one for its power, the other to focus it — they begin the creation of another house in the plains of the Outer Dark, beyond the walls of the High House. As the new house grows, the original High House begins to change, transforming into a place of extreme order, all straight angles and sensible decor. Not even the inhabitants are immune to the influence as numbers of them mutate into strange mechanical versions of themselves — so much more efficient than flesh and blood bodies, you see.

Naturally, Carter Anderson, the Master of the High House, has to deal with it, and so he does.

The good news is that Stoddard does deliver another solid story of quirky mishaps and derring-do. But while the sequel is an entertaining enough novel in its own right, there's nothing particularly innovative about it — especially when compared to the first book. In some senses, it reads like a franchise novel, by which I mean, come the end of the book, none of the characters have really grown or been changed by their experiences (my one real complaint with all those novels based on popular TV series and films). Although to be fair, the Master's brother Duskin does undergo a bit of character growth. But since he's hardly at the center of the action for most of the book, I'm not sure it counts.

So is it worth reading? If you loved *The High House* and don't mind more of the same, then, yes. Definitely. Otherwise, do like I plan to do in the future and wait to see Stoddard turn his considerable talents to a new, unrelated project.

Material to be considered for review in this column should be sent to Charles de Lint, P.O. Box 9480, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3V2.

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BOOKS

ELIZABETH HAND

American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction, by Dale Bailey, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999, $40.95 hc, $20.95 pb.

HOUSEBROKEN

Well, after many months, I finally saw *The Blair Witch Project*, the movie that exhorts viewers "Be afraid. Be sort of afraid." I was looking forward to *Blair Witch* — people whose opinions do not usually embarrass me seemed to like it, and I scored what felt like a minor coup by snagging a copy of the videotape to watch on Hallowe'en night, in the company of a highly respected editor of supernatural fiction whose taste usually dovetails with mine. Plus, I liked the font they used for the movie's print advertising, also the creepy music.

It may well be that the buildup for the film made disappointment inevitable: my children (at seven and nine, still far too young to watch it, though apparently that didn't prevent some of their friends, with far more lenient Moms, from doing so) didn't even want a copy of the tape in the house. Or it may be that a recent project by my son's second-grade class — the creation of little stick people, using twigs and hempen rope — successfully pre-empted a terrified reaction on my part to seeing scary little stick people hanging from trees in Burkittsville, Maryland. Or it may be the inherently low Scary Rating of suburban Burkittsville itself, a place which is a lot less spooky than the Tysons Corner Mall in neighboring Virginia, or even certain precincts of Capitol Hill when Congress is in session.

Whatever. I didn't find *The Blair Witch Project* remotely frightening. At breakfast the next day I gave a brief, reassuring précis of the film to the children, highlighting

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the fact that most of the ostensibly scary stuff derived from the sight of three college kids getting lost in the woods. My son (the one who participated in the Lincolnville Witch Project) commented that "probably they didn't live in Maine."

A safer assumption might be that probably they never saw a lot of trees before, or read a book, or even saw *The Amityville Horror.* My only lasting regret is that the story *wasn't* true, because then we might at least be bolstered by the hope that hundreds of other nascent filmmakers would descend upon the site and end up standing in the ruined house's various corners, looking sheepish and badly lit. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, anyone who can watch the final moments of *The Blair Witch Project* without laughing doesn't have a heart.

Like *The Amityville Horror, The Blair Witch Project* is a silly, low-budget horror movie that a lot of people connected with, my visiting editor friend among them (although she lives in lower Manhattan, and so can perhaps be excused for a bad reaction to the sight of lots of trees). Where *The Blair Witch Project* is more interesting — and ominous — is as a harbinger of post-narrative entertainment, in both cinematic and written form. In this respect, it's the supernatural equivalent of those cheap porn videos that are all come shots — no character development, no sets, no acting and no script *per se;* just vocalization and body language, Boo instead of Boink.

It did, however, rouse me enough that I started scrabbling around the bookshelves, looking for something genuinely scary; and in so doing realized a serious omission in my Hallowe'en reading. Somehow, in three decades of poring over crepuscular fiction, *I had never read Shirley Jackson's* The Haunting of Hill House.

This seems almost inexcusable, and perhaps it *wasn't* excused, because just as I cracked the spine of my copy of *Hill House,* (purchased second-hand in 1970), what should arrive in the evening mail but Dale Bailey's *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction.*

Coincidence? Perhaps; but certainly more benign, and more literate, forces were at work here than in *The Blair Witch Project. American Nightmares* is a slender volume, 145 pages including footnotes, bibliography and index; more academic *lagniappe* than scholarly tome. But in this brief work Bailey

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does a thorough and thoroughly entertaining job of sifting through the cultural detritus of various American ruins, taking us from Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables to the smoldering wreckage of Poe's House of Usher, and then moving rather quickly past the stately haunted homes erected by Henry James and Edith Wharton. In the process, he manages to visit all the important literary landmarks on the Haunted House Tour, with no obvious omissions. This is all well-traveled haunted ground, of course; yet Bailey provides an amiable introduction to these authors, even as he hastens us towards the Overlook Hotel—

> Wharton and James are all waltz to the rollicking beat of Poe's manic reel. And Hawthorne doesn't dance.

The early pages of Bailey's study, where he skips rather breathlessly through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books, is the weakest. But as Poe, Hawthorne, James, et al. are not exactly unremarked upon in the Ivory Tower, Bailey can be forgiven his haste in dealing with them and bringing us right to the good stuff—*The Haunting of Hill House, The Shining, Burnt Offerings, The People Next Door.* Most of these are familiar to us now as movies, but Bailey does a stellar job of revealing the architecture of the novels, and of summing up other critical studies of the same works. Bailey on Shirley Jackson is especially good. He gives a succinct, even terse, assessment of the feminist structure of *Hill House* which compares it to an earlier and equally terrifying piece, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." I first read "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a child, and found it so unsettling that it made me rather sick. Since then the novella has been, rightfully, reclaimed by feminists, who have made much of the parallels between the story's protagonist—a woman suffering from what we would now term post-natal depression — and Gilman herself, who suffered from depression and lost custody of her young daughter when her husband remarried.

Like the imprisoned woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman wrote that she would "crawl into remote closets and under beds — to hide from the grinding pressure of that profound distress." Still, Gilman recovered from her depression and went on to become a well-known feminist writer and speaker.

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In a more ironic trope of life imitating art, Shirley Jackson reaped the rewards of her successful novels and autobiographical writings *(Life among the Savages* and *Raising Demons),* but ended her life suffering from agoraphobia and various other mental ailments. The most cogent chapter in *American Nightmares* is "June Cleaver in the House of Horrors," which deals with *The Haunting of Hill House* and its relation to Jackson's popular nonfiction, where she wrote about her family with typically understated but often caustic humor. Bailey cites the opening paragraph of *Life Among the Savages,* her account of raising four children and literary critic husband in the wilds of Bennington, Vermont —

> Our house is old, and noisy, and full.... I cannot think of a preferable way of life, except one without children and without books, going on soundlessly in an apartment hotel where they do the cleaning for you and send up your meals and all you have to do is lie on a couch and — as I say, I cannot think of a preferable way of life, but then I have had to make a good many compromises, all told.

What *American Nightmares* makes particularly clear, and chilling, are the parallels between Jackson's sickroom vision and the breakdown of Gilman's heroine, as well as that of Eleanor, the doomed protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House.* Jackson may not have been done in as gruesomely as Eleanor, who drives her car into a tree at Hill House's gates, and she may not have ended her days crawling naked over the body of her husband, like the woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper"; but the spectre of a house — *The* House, with all it contains of traditional female duty and obligation, housework and children and muck — looms starkly over Jackson's own life, as it did in her various novels. Jackson's work contains other gloomy domestic edifices, most notably in *The Bird's Nest* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle.* Bailey could have done more with these — instead, he mentions them only in a footnote. (As for the recent film *The Haunting,* ostensibly based on *The Haunting of Hill House* — it makes one yearn for the restraint, subtle character development and refined good taste of something like Bob Guccione's *Caligula.)*

But then, this is a breezy haunted house tour, not a dreary academic tome, and we have still to visit Amityville, the Overlook Ho-

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tel and Siddons's newly constructed House Next Door. Bailey deals with these thoughtfully and concisely, though his discussions of Siddons's book and *The Amityville Horror* owe a heavy debt to Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*, which discussed both works in detail. Of course, it's difficult to find any haunted ground where King's shadow has not already fallen. Bailey's treatment of *The Amityville Horror*, especially, serves mostly as a retread of King's well-known commentary on the Amityville phenomenon. King found *The Amityville Horror*'s commercial success almost inexplicable, until he overheard a woman near him in the movie theater remark, apropos the Amityville house's self-destruction, "Think of the bills!"

This pretty well sums up Bailey's argument for the haunted house as "a symbol of America and the American mind," the dream house that enacts retribution upon its owners or those who make misguided claims upon it, like Jack Torrance in *The Shining* or Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House*.

> As in most haunted house tales, the house gradually infects its inhabitants, exploiting the weaknesses of each family member and splintering their loyalties to one another; their emotional and psychological decay begins to reflect the house's physical and moral disorder.

The Amityville Horror, as King made clear in *Danse Macabre*, was very much a reflection of the bourgeois anxieties of its time — the mid-1970s, when inflation and the fallout of 1960s counterculture were beginning to erode the vision of The Good Life for many Americans. It wouldn't take much to popularize a 21st-century Amityville Horror — just fall behind on a few mortgage payments for your MacMansion and Ford Explorer — but I do wonder if the haunted house will actually prove to be an enduring American archetype. Bailey appears to think so — he ends *American Nightmares* with thumbnail analyses of *2001* (the haunted spaceship) and Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains" (haunted space colony), and the observation that "it seems unlikely that we will soon exhaust the haunted house's metaphorical potential."

And yes, as metaphor the haunted house can easily morph — say, into a haunted internet. What's a computer virus, after all, but a real-life ghost in the machine, wreaking havoc and causing even

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more expensive problems than those plaguing unhappy homeowners in Amityville?

But *The Blair Witch Project*, at least, seems to indicate another source of cultural unease — a profound fear and distrust of the natural world, embodied in Burkittville's relatively innocuous woods and streams and rocks. Because here we are, spending more and more time indoors, peering into the interstices of the net and surfing for the best price for those Patagonia hiking boots we'll never actually use; and meanwhile, there is all that gross organic stuff *Out There*, what remains of it, anyway, after global warming and deforestation and killer microbes have had their way, and boy, those trees are probably pretty pissed off at us by now, and —

— but that's another can of creepy crawlies waiting to be opened, in another century.

Boo.

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"Flowers for Algernon" is one of those stories that has entered the national consciousness, like Catch-22 *or* Fahrenheit 451. *But the original story (as opposed to the novel) hasn't been as readily available in recent years as it used to be, especially since* The Science Fiction Hall of Fame *and* The Hugo Winners *went out of print. It's with great joy that we bring you again this American classic.*

Flowers for Algernon

By Daniel Keyes

progris riport 1 — martch 5

DR. STRAUSS SAYS I SHUD rite down what I think and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont know why but he says its importint so they will see if they will use me. I hope they use me. Miss Kinnian says maybe they can make me smart. I want to be smart. My name is Charlie Gordon. I am 37 years old and 2 weeks ago was my brithday. I have nuthing more to rite now so I will close for today.

progris riport 2 — martch 6

I had a test today. I think I faled it. and I think that maybe now they wont use me. What happind is a nice young man was in the room and he had some white cards with ink spillled all over them. He sed Charlie what do you see on this card. I was very skared even tho I had my rabits foot in my pockit because when I was a kid I always faled tests in school and I spillled ink to. I told him I saw a inkblot. He said yes and it made me feel

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good. I thot that was all but when I got up to go he stopped me. He said now sit down Charlie we are not thru yet. Then I dont remember so good but he wantid me to say what was in the ink. I dint see nuthing in the ink but he said there was picturs there other pepul saw some picturs. I coudnt see any picturs. I reely tryed to see. I held the card close up and then far away. Then I said if I had my glases I coud see better I usally only ware my glases in the movies or TV but I said they are in the closit in the hall. I got them. Then I said let me see that card agen I bet Ill find it now.

I tryed hard but I still coudnt find the picturs I only saw the ink. I told him maybe I need new glases. He rote somthing down on a paper and I got skared of faling the test. I told him it was a very nice inkblot with littel points all around the eges. He looked very sad so that wasnt it. I said please let me try agen. Ill get it in a few minits becaus Im not so fast somtimes. Im a slow reeder too in Miss Kinnians class for slow adults but I'm trying very hard.

He gave me a chance with another card that had 2 kinds of ink spillled on it red and blue.

He was very nice and talked slow like Miss Kinnian does and he explaned it to me that it was a raw shok. He said pepul see things in the ink. I said show me where. He said think. I told him I think a inkblot but that wasnt rite eather. He said what does it remind you-pretend some thing. I closd my eyes for a long time to pretend. I told him I pretned a fowntan pen with ink leeking all over a table cloth. Then he got up and went out.

I dont think I passd the *raw shok* test.

progris report 3 — martch 7

Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur say it dont matter about the inkblots. I told them I dint spill the ink on the cards and I coudnt see any-thing in the ink. They said that maybe they will still use me. I said Miss Kinnian never gave me tests like that one only spelling and reading. They said Miss Kinnian told that I was her bestist pupil in the adult nite scool becaus I tryed the hardist and I reely wantid to lern. They said how come you went to the adult nite scool all by yourself Charlie. How did you find it. I said I askd pepul and sum-body told me where I shud go to lern to read and spell good. They said why did you want to. I told them becaus all my life I wantid to

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be smart and not dumb. But its very hard to be smart. They said you know it will probly be tempirery. I said yes Miss Kinnian told me. I dont care if it herts.

Later I had more crazy tests today. The nice lady who gave it me told me the name and I asked her how do you spellit so I can rite it in my progris riport. THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST. I dont know the frist 2 words but I know what test means. You got to pass it or you get bad marks. This test lookd easy becaus I coud see the picturs. Only this time she dint want me to tell her the picturs. That mixd me up. I said the man yesterday said I shoud tell him what I saw in the ink she said that dont make no difrence. She said make up storys about the pepul in the picturs.

I told her how can you tell storys about pepul you never met. I said why shud I make up lies. I never tell lies any more becaus I always get caut.

She told me this test and the other one the raw-shok was for getting personalty. I laffed so hard. I said how can you get that thing from inkblots and fotos. She got sore and put her picturs away. I dont care. It was sily. I gess I faled that test too.

Later some men in white coats took me to a difernt part of the hospitil and gave me a game to play. It was like a race with a white mouse. They called the mouse Algernon. Algernon was in a box with a lot of twists and turns like all kinds of walls and they gave me a pencil and a paper with lines and lots of boxes. On one side it said START and on the other end it said FINISH. They said it was amazed and that Algernon and me had the same amazed to do. I dint see how we could have the same amazed if Algernon had a box and I had a paper but I dint say nothing. Anyway there wasnt time because the race started.

One of the men had a watch he was trying to hide so I woudnt see it so I tryed not to look and that made me nervus. Anyway that test made me feel worser than all the others because they did it over 10 times with difernt amazeds and Algernon won every time. I dint know that mice were so smart. Maybe thats because Algernon is a white mouse. Maybe white mice are smarter then other mice.

progris riport 4 — Mar 8

Their going to use me! Im so exited I can hardly write. Dr Nemur and Dr Strauss had a argament about it first. Dr Nemur was in the office when

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Dr Strauss brot me in. Dr Nemur was worryed about using me but Dr Strauss told him Miss Kinnian rekemmended me the best from all the people who she was teaching. I like Miss Kinnian becaus shes a very smart teacher. And she said Charlie your going to have a second chance. If you volenteer for this experament you mite get smart. They dont know if it will be perminint but theirs a chance. Thats why I said ok even when I was scared because she said it was an operashun. She said dont be scared Charlie you done so much with so little I think you deserv it most of all.

So I got scaird when Dr Nemur and Dr Strauss argud about it. Dr Strauss said I had something that was very good. He said I had a good *motor-vation*. I never even knew I had that. I felt proud when he said that not every body with an eye-q of 68 had that thing. I dont know what it is or where I got it but he said Algernon had it too. Algernons *motor-vation* is the cheese they put in his box. But it cant be that because I didnt eat any cheese this week.

Then he told Dr Nemur something I dint understand so while they were talking I wrote down some of the words.

He said Dr Nemur I know Charlie is not what you had in mind as the first of your new brede of intelek** (coudnt get the word) superman. But most people of his low ment** are host** and uncoop** they are usualy dull apath** and hard to reach. He has a good natcher hes intristed and eager to please.

Dr Nemur said remember he will be the first human beeng ever to have his intelijence trippled by surgicle meens.

Dr Strauss said exakly. Look at how well hes lerned to read and write for his low mentel age its as grate an acheve ** as you and I lerning einstines therey of **vity without help. That shows the intenss motor-vation. Its comparat** a tremen** achev ** I say we use Charlie.

I dint get all the words and they were talking to fast but it sounded like Dr Strauss was on my side and like the other one wasnt.

Then Dr Nemur nodded he said all right maybe your right. We will use Charlie. When he said that I got so exited I jumped up and shook his hand for being so good to me. I told him thank you doc you wont be sorry for giving me a second chance. And I mean it like I told him. After the operashun Im gonna try to be smart. Im gonna try awful hard.

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progris ript 5 — Mar 10

Im skared. Lots of people who work here and the nurses and the people who gave me the tests came to bring me candy and wish me luck. I hope I have luck. I got my rabits foot and my lucky penny and my horse shoe. Only a black cat crossed me when I was comming to the hospitil. Dr Strauss says dont be supersitis Charlie this is sience. Anyway Im keeping my rabits foot with me.

I asked Dr Strauss if Ill beat Algernon in the race after the operashun and he said maybe. If the operashun works Ill show that mouse I can be as smart as he is. Maybe smarter. Then Ill be abel to read better and spell the words good and know lots of things and be like other people. I want to be smart like other people. If it works perminint they will make everybody smart all over the wurld.

They dint give me anything to eat this morning. I dont know what that eating has to do with getting smart. Im very hungry and Dr Nemur took away my box of candy. That Dr Nemur is a grouch. Dr Strauss says I can have it back after the operashun. You cant eat befor a operashun.

Progress Report 6 — Mar 15

The operashun dint hurt. He did it while I was sleeping. They took off the bandijis from my eyes and my head today so I can make a PROGRESS REPORT. Dr Nemur who looked at some of my other ones says I spell PROGRESS wrong and he told me how to spell it and REPORT too. I got to try and remember that.

I have a very bad memary for spelling. Dr Strauss says its Ok to tell about all the things that happin to me but he says I shoud tell more about what I feel and what I think. When I told him I dont know how to think he said try. All the time when the bandijis were on my eyes I tryed to think. Nothing happened. I dont know what to think about. Maybe if I ask him he will tell me how I can think now that Im suppose to get smart. What do smart people think about. Fancy things I suppose. I wish I knew some fancy things alredy.

Progress Report 7 — Mar 19

Nothing is happining. I had lots of tests and different kinds of races with Algernon. I hate that mouse. He always beats me. Dr Strauss said I

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got to play those games. And he said some time I got to take those tests over again. These inkblots are stupid. And those pictures are stupid too. I like to draw a picture of a man and a woman but I wont make up lies about people.

I got a headache from trying to think so much. I thot Dr Strauss was my frend but he dont help me. He dont tell me what to think or when Ill get smart. Miss Kinnian dint come to see me. I think writing these progress reports are stupid too.

Progress Report 8 — Mar 23

Im going back to work at the factery. They said it was better I shud go back to work but I cant tell anyone what the operashun was for and I have to come to the hospitil for an hour evry night after work. They are gonna pay me mony every month for lerning to be smart. Im glad Im going back to work because I miss my job and all my frends and all the fun we have there.

Dr Strauss says I shud keep writing things down but I dont have to do it every day just when I think of something or something speshul happins. He says dont get discoridged because it takes time and it happins slow. He says it took a long time with Algernon before he got 3 times smarter then he was before. Thats why Algernon beats me all the time because he had that operashun too. That makes me feel better. I coud probly do that *amazed* faster than a reglar mouse. Maybe some day Ill beat Algernon. Boy that would be something. So far Algernon looks like he mite be smart perminent.

Mar 25 (I dont have to write PROGRESS REPORT on top any more just when I hand it in once a week for Dr Nemur to read. I just have to put the date on. That saves time)

We had a lot of fun at the factery today. Joe Carp said hey look where Charlie had his operashun what did they do Charlie put some brains in. I was going to tell him but I remembered Dr Strauss said no. Then Frank Reilly said what did you do Charlie forget your key and open your door the hard way. That made me laff. Their really my friends and they like me.

Sometimes somebody will say hey look at Joe or Frank or George he really pulled a Charlie Gordon. I dont know why they say that but they always laff. This morning Amos Borg who is the 4 man at Donnegans used

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my name when he shouted at Ernie the office boy. Ernie lost a packige. He said Ernie for godsake what are you trying to be a Charlie Gordon. I dont understand why he said that. I never lost any packiges.

Mar 28 Dr Strauss came to my room tonight to see why I dint come in like I was suppose to. I told him I dont like to race with Algernon any more. He said I dont have to for a while but I shud come in. He had a present for me only it wasnt a present but just for lend. I thot it was a little television but it wasnt. He said I got to turn it on when I go to sleep. I said your kidding why shud I turn it on when Im going to sleep. Who ever herd of a thing like that. But he said if I want to get smart I got to do what he says. I told him I dint think I was going to get smart and he put his hand on my sholder and said Charlie you dont know it yet but your getting smarter all the time. You wont notice for a while. I think he was just being nice to make me feel good because I dont look any smarter.

Oh yes I almost forgot. I asked him when I can go back to the class at Miss Kinnians school. He said I wont go their. He said that soon Miss Kinnian will come to the hospitil to start and teach me speshul. I was mad at her for not comming to see me when I got the operashun but I like her so maybe we will be frends again.

Mar 29 That crazy TV kept me up all night. How can I sleep with something yelling crazy things all night in my ears. And the nutty pictures. Wow. I dont know what it says when Im up so how am I going to know when Im sleeping.

Dr Strauss says its ok. He says my brains are lerning when I sleep and that will help me when Miss Kinnian starts my lessons in the hospitl (only I found out it isnt a hospitil its a labatory) . I think its all crazy. If you can get smart when your sleeping why do people go to school. That thing I dont think will work. I use to watch the late show and the late late show on TV all the time and it never made me smart. Maybe you have to sleep while you watch it.

PROGRESS REPORT 9 — April 3

Dr Strauss showed me how to keep the TV turned low so now I can sleep. I dont hear a thing. And I still dont understand what it says. A few

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times I play it over in the morning to find out what I lerned when I was sleeping and I dont think so. Miss Kinnian says Maybe its another langwidge or something. But most times it sounds american. It talks so fast faster then even Miss Gold who was my teacher in 6 grade and I remember she talked so fast I coudnt understand her.

I told Dr Strauss what good is it to get smart in my sleep. I want to be smart when Im awake. He says its the same thing and I have two minds. Theres the *subconscious* and the *conscious* (thats how you spell it). And one dont tell the other one what its doing. They dont even talk to each other. Thats why I dream. And boy have I been having crazy dreams. Wow. Ever since that night TV. The late late late late late show.

I forgot to ask him if it was only me or if everybody had those two minds.

(I just looked up the word in the dictionary Dr Strauss gave me. The word is *subconscious. adj. Of the nature of mental operations yet not present in consciousness; as, subconscious conflict of desires.)* Theres more but I still don't know what it means. This isnt a very good dictionary for dumb people like me. Anyway the headache is from the party. My frends from the factery Joe Carp and Frank Reilly invited me to go with them to Muggsys Saloon for some drinks. I dont like to drink but they said we will have lots of fun. I had a good time.

Joe Carp said I shoud show the girls how I mop out the toilet in the factory and he got me a mop. I showed them and everyone laffed when I told that Mr Donnegan said I was the best janiter he ever had because I like my job and do it good and never come late or miss a day except for my operashun.

I said Miss Kinnian always said Charlie be proud of your job because you do it good.

Everybody laffed and we had a good time and they gave me lots of drinks and Joe said Charlie is a card when hes potted. I dont know what that means but everybody likes me and we have fun. I cant wait to be smart like my best frends Joe Carp and Frank Reilly.

I dont remember how the party was over but I think I went out to buy a newspaper and coffe for Joe and Frank and when I came back there was no one their. I looked for them all over till late. Then I dont remember so good but I think I got sleepy or sick. A nice cop brot me back home. Thats what my landlady Mrs Flynn says.

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But I got a headache and a big lump on my head and black and blue all over. I think maybe I fell but Joe Carp says it was the cop they beat up drunks some times. I don't think so. Miss Kinnian says cops are to help people. Anyway I got a bad headache and Im sick and hurt all over. I dont think Ill drink anymore.

April 6 I beat Algernon! I dint even know I beat him until Burt the tester told me. Then the second time I lost because I got so exited I fell off the chair before I finished. But after that I beat him 8 more times. I must be getting smart to beat a smart mouse like Algernon. But I dont feel smarter.

I wanted to race Algernon some more but Burt said thats enough for one day. They let me hold him for a minit. Hes not so bad. Hes soft like a ball of cotton. He blinks and when he opens his eyes their black and pink on the eges.

I said can I feed him because I felt bad to beat him and I wanted to be nice and make frends. Burt said no Algernon is a very specshul mouse with an operashun like mine, and he was the first of all the animals to stay smart so long. He told me Algernon is so smart that every day he has to solve a test to get his food. Its a thing like a lock on a door that changes every time Algernon goes in to eat so he has to lern something new to get his food. That made me sad because if he coudnt lern he woud be hungry.

I dont think its right to make you pass a test to eat. How woud Dr Nemur like it to have to pass a test every time he wants to eat. I think Ill be frends with Algernon.

April 9 Tonight after work Miss Kinnian was at the laboratory. She looked like she was glad to see me but scared. I told her dont worry Miss Kinnian Im not smart yet and she laffed. She said I have confidence in you Charlie the way you struggled so hard to read and right better than all the others. At werst you will have it for a littel wile and your doing somthing for sience.

We are reading a very hard book. I never read such a hard book before. Its called *Robinson Crusoe* about a man who gets merooned on a dessert Iland. Hes smart and figers out all kinds of things so he can have a house and food and hes a good swimmer. Only I feel sorry because hes all alone

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and has no frends. But I think their must be somebody else on the iland because theres a picture with his funny umbrella looking at footprints. I hope he gets a frend and not be lonly.

April 10 Miss Kinnian teaches me to spell better. She says look at a word and close your eyes and say it over and over until you remember. I have lots of truble with *through* that you say *threw* and *enough* and *tough* that you dont say *enew* and *tew*. You got to say *enuff* and *tuff*. Thats how I use to write it before I started to get smart. Im confused but Miss Kinnian says theres no reason in spelling.

Apr 14 Finished *Robinson Crusoe*. I want to find out more about what happens to him but Miss Kinnian says thats all there is. *Why*

Apr 15 Miss Kinnian says Im lerning fast. She read some of the Progress Reports and she looked at me kind of funny. She says Im a fine person and Ill show them all. I asked her why. She said never mind but I shoudnt feel bad if I find out that everybody isnt nice like I think. She said for a person who god gave so little to you done more then a lot of people with brains they never even used. I said all my frends are smart people but there good. They like me and they never did anything that wasnt nice. Then she got something in her eye and she had to run out to the ladys room.

Apr 16 Today, I lerned, the *comma*, this is a comma (,) a period, with a tail, Miss Kinnian, says its importent, because, it makes writing, better, she said, sombeody, coud lose, a lot of money, if a comma, isnt, in the, right place, I dont have, any money, and I dont see, how a comma, keeps you, from losing it,

But she says, everybody, uses commas, so Ill use, them too,

Apr 17 I used the comma wrong. Its punctuation. Miss Kinnian told me to look up long words in the dictionary to lern to spell them. I said whats the difference if you can read it anyway. She said its part of your education so now on Ill look up all the words Im not sure how to spell. It takes a long time to write that way but I think Im remembering. I only

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have to look up once and after that I get it right. Anyway thats how come I got the word *punctuation* right. (Its that way in the dictionary). Miss Kinnian says a period is punctuation too, and there are lots of other marks to lern. I told her I thot all the periods had to have tails but she said no.

You got to mix them up, she showed? me" how. to mix! them(up,. and now; I can! mix up all kinds" of punctuation, in! my writing? There, are lots! of rules? to lern; but Im gettin'g them in my head.

One thing I? like about, Dear Miss Kinnian: (thats the way it goes in a business letter if I ever go into business) is she, always gives me' a reason" when — I ask. She's a gen'ius! I wish! I cou'd be smart" like, her;

(Punctuation, is; fun!)

April 18 What a dope I am! I didn't even understand what she was talking about. I read the grammar book last night and it explanes the whole thing. Then I saw it was the same way as Miss Kinnian was trying to tell me, but I didn't get it. I got up in the middle of the night, and the whole thing straightened out in my mind.

Miss Kinnian said that the TV working in my sleep helped out. She said I reached a plateau. Thats like the flat top of a hill.

After I figgered out how punctuation worked, I read over all my old Progress Reports from the beginning. Boy, did I have crazy spelling and punctuation! I told Miss Kinnian I ought to go over the pages and fix all the mistakes but she said, "No, Charlie, Dr. Nemur wants them just as they are. That's why he let you keep them after they were photostated, to see your own progress. You're coming along fast, Charlie."

That made me feel good. After the lesson I went down and played with Algernon. We don't race anymore.

April 20 I feel sick inside. Not sick like for a doctor, but inside my chest it feels empty like getting punched and a heartburn at the same time.

I wasn't going to write about it, but I guess I got to, because it's important. Today was the first time I ever stayed home from work.

Last night Joe Carp and Frank Reilly invited me to a party. There were lots of girls and some men from the factory. I remembered how sick I got last time I drank too much, so I told Joe I didn't want anything to drink.

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He gave me a plain Coke instead. It tasted funny, but I thought it was just a bad taste in my mouth.

We had a lot of fun for a while. Joe said I should dance with Ellen and she would teach me the steps. I fell a few times and I couldn't understand why because no one else was dancing besides Ellen and me. And all the time I was tripping because somebody's foot was always sticking out.

Then when I got up I saw the look on Joe's face and it gave me a funny feeling in my stomach. "He's a scream," one of the girls said. Everybody was laughing.

Frank said, "I ain't laughed so much since we sent him off for the newspaper that night at Muggsy's and ditched him."

"Look at him. His face is red."

"He's blushing. Charlie is blushing."

"Hey, Ellen, what'd you do to Charlie? I never saw him act like that before."

I didn't know what to do or where to turn. Everyone was looking at me and laughing and I felt naked. I wanted to hide myself. I ran out into the street and I threw up. Then I walked home. It's a funny thing I never knew that Joe and Frank and the others liked to have me around all the time to make fun of me.

Now I know what it means when they say "to pull a Charlie Gordon."

I'm ashamed.

PROGRESS REPORT 11

April 21 Still didn't go into the factory. I told Mrs. Flynn my landlady to call and tell Mr. Donnegan I was sick. Mrs. Flynn looks at me very funny lately like she's scared of me.

I think it's a good thing about finding out how everybody laughs at me. I thought about it a lot. It's because I'm so dumb and I don't even know when I'm doing something dumb. People think it's funny when a dumb person can't do things the same way they can.

Anyway, now I know I'm getting smarter every day. I know punctuation and I can spell good. I like to look up all the hard words in the dictionary and I remember them. I'm reading a lot now, and Miss Kinnian says I read very fast.

Sometimes I even understand what I'm reading about, and it stays in

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my mind. There are times when I can close my eyes and think of a page and it all comes back like a picture.

Besides history, geography, and arithmetic, Miss Kinnian said I should start to learn a few foreign languages. Dr. Strauss gave me some more tapes to play while I sleep. I still don't understand how that conscious and unconscious mind works, but Dr. Strauss says not to worry yet. He asked me to promise that when I start learning college subjects next week I wouldn't read any books on psychology — that is, until he gives me permission.

I feel a lot better today, but I guess I'm still a little angry that all the time people were laughing and making fun of me because I wasn't so smart. When I become intelligent like Dr. Strauss says, with three times my I.Q. of 68, then maybe I'll be like everyone else and people will like me and be friendly.

I'm not sure what an I.Q. is. Dr. Nemur said it was something that measured how intelligent you were — like a scale in the drugstore weighs pounds. But Dr. Strauss had a big argument with him and said an I.Q. didn't weigh intelligence at all. He said an I.Q. showed how much intelligence you could get, like the numbers on the outside of a measuring cup. You still had to fill the cup up with stuff.

Then when I asked Burt, who gives me my intelligence tests and works with Algernon, he said that both of them were wrong (only I had to promise not to tell them he said so). Burt says that the I.Q. measures a lot of different things including some of the things you learned already, and it really isn't any good at all.

So I still don't know what I.Q. is except that mine is going to be over 200 soon. I didn't want to say anything, but I don't see how if they don't know what it is, or where it is — I don't see how they know how much of it you've got.

Dr. Nemur says I have to take a Rorschach Test tomorrow. I wonder what that is.

April 22 I found out what a *Rorschach* is. It's the test I took before the operation — the one with the inkblots on the pieces of cardboard. The man who gave me the test was the same one.

I was scared to death of those inkblots. I knew he was going to ask me

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to find the pictures and I knew I wouldn't be able to. I was thinking to myself, if only there was some way of knowing what kind of pictures were hidden there. Maybe there weren't any pictures at all. Maybe it was just a trick to see if I was dumb enough to look for something that wasn't there. Just thinking about that made me sore at him.

"All right, Charlie," he said, "you've seen these cards before, remember?"

"Of course I remember."

The way I said it, he knew I was angry, and he looked surprised. "Yes, of course. Now I want you to look at this one. What might this be? What do you see on this card? People see all sorts of things in these inkblots. Tell me what it might be for you — what it makes you think of."

I was shocked. That wasn't what I had expected him to say at all. "You mean there are no pictures hidden in those inkblots?"

He frowned and took off his glasses. "What?"

"Pictures. Hidden in the inkblots. Last time you told me that everyone could see them and you wanted me to find them too."

He explained to me that the last time he had used almost the exact same words he was using now. I didn't believe it, and I still have the suspicion that he misled me at the time just for the fun of it. Unless — I don't know anymore — could I have been that feebleminded?

We went through the cards slowly. One of them looked like a pair of bats tugging at something. Another one looked like two men fencing with swords. I imagined all sorts of things. I guess I got carried away. But I didn't trust him anymore, and I kept turning them around and even looking on the back to see if there was anything there I was supposed to catch. While he was making his notes, I peeked out of the corner of my eye to read it. But it was all in code that looked like this:

WF+A DdF-Ad orig. WF-A SF+obj

The test still doesn't make sense to me. It seems to me that anyone could make up lies about things that they didn't really see. How could he know I wasn't making a fool of him by mentioning things that I didn't really imagine? Maybe I'll understand it when Dr. Strauss lets me read up on psychology.

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April 25 I figured out a new way to line up the machines in the factory, and Mr. Donnegan says it will save him ten thousand dollars a year in labor and increased production. He gave me a twenty-five-dollar bonus.

I wanted to take Joe Carp and Frank Reilly out to lunch to celebrate, but Joe said he had to buy some things for his wife, and Frank said he was meeting his cousin for lunch. I guess it'll take a little time for them to get used to the changes in me. Everybody seems to be frightened of me. When I went over to Amos Borg and tapped him on the shoulder, he jumped up in the air.

People don't talk to me much anymore or kid around the way they used to. It makes the job kind of lonely.

April 27 I got up the nerve today to ask Miss Kinnian to have dinner with me tomorrow night to celebrate my bonus.

At first she wasn't sure it was right, but I asked Dr. Strauss and he said it was okay. Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur don't seem to be getting along so well. They're arguing all the time. This evening when I came in to ask Dr. Strauss about having dinner with Miss Kinnian, I heard them shouting. Dr. Nemur was saying that it was his experiment and his research, and Dr. Strauss was shouting back that he contributed just as much, because he found me through Miss Kinnian and he performed the operation. Dr. Strauss said that someday thousands of neurosurgeons might be using his technique all over the world.

Dr. Nemur wanted to publish the results of the experiment at the end of this month. Dr. Strauss wanted to wait a while longer to be sure. Dr. Strauss said that Dr. Nemur was more interested in the Chair of Psychology at Princeton than he was in the experiment. Dr. Nemur said that Dr. Strauss was nothing but an opportunist who was trying to ride to glory on his coattails.

When I left afterwards, I found myself trembling. I don't know why for sure, but it was as if I'd seen both men clearly for the first time. I remember hearing Burt say that Dr. Nemur had a shrew of a wife who was pushing him all the time to get things published so that he could become famous. Burt said that the dream of her life was to have a big-shot husband.

Was Dr. Strauss really trying to ride on his coattails?

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April 28 I don't understand why I never noticed how beautiful Miss Kinnian really is. She has brown eyes and feathery brown hair that comes to the top of her neck. She's only thirty-four! I think from the beginning I had the feeling that she was an unreachable genius — and very, very old. Now, every time I see her she grows younger and more lovely.

We had dinner and a long talk. When she said that I was coming along so fast that soon I'd be leaving her behind, I laughed.

"It's true, Charlie. You're already a better reader than I am. You can read a whole page at a glance while I can take in only a few lines at a time. And you remember every single thing you read. I'm lucky if I can recall the main thoughts and the general meaning."

"I don't feel intelligent. There are so many things I don't understand."

She took out a cigarette and I lit it for her. "You've got to be a little patient. You're accomplishing in days and weeks what it takes normal people to do in half a lifetime. That's what makes it so amazing. You're like a giant sponge now, soaking things in. Facts, figures, general knowledge. And soon you'll begin to connect them, too. You'll see how the different branches of learning are related. There are many levels, Charlie, like steps on a giant ladder that take you up higher and higher to see more and more of the world around you.

"I can see only a little bit of that, Charlie, and I won't go much higher than I am now, but you'll keep climbing up and up, and see more and more, and each step will open new worlds that you never even knew existed." She frowned. "I hope...I just hope to God — ".

"What?"

"Never mind, Charles. I just hope I wasn't wrong to advise you to go into this in the first place."

I laughed. "How could that be? It worked, didn't it? Even Algernon is still smart."

We sat there silently for a while and I knew what she was thinking about as she watched me toying with the chain of my rabbit's foot and my keys. I didn't want to think of that possibility any more than elderly people want to think of death. I *knew* that this was only the beginning. I knew what she meant about levels because I'd seen some of them already. The thought of leaving her behind made me sad.

I'm in love with Miss Kinnian.

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PROGRESS REPORT 12

April 30 I've quit my job with Donnegan's Plastic Box Company. Mr. Donnegan insisted that it would be better for all concerned if I left. What did I do to make them hate me so?

The first I knew of it was when Mr. Donnegan showed me the petition. Eight hundred and forty names, everyone connected with the factory except Fanny Girden. Scanning the list quickly, I saw at once that hers was the only missing name. All the rest demanded that I be fired.

Joe Carp and Frank Reilly wouldn't talk to me about it. No one else would either, except Fanny. She was one of the few people I'd known who set her mind to something and believed it no matter what the rest of the world proved, said, or did — and Fanny did not believe that I should have been fired. She had been against the petition on principle and despite the pressure and threats she'd held out.

"Which don't mean to say," she remarked, "that I don't think there's something mighty strange about you, Charlie. Them changes. I don't know. You used to be a good, dependable, ordinary man — not too bright maybe, but honest. Who knows what you done to yourself to get so smart all of a sudden. Like everybody around here's been saying, Charlie, it's not right."

"But how can you say that, Fanny? What's wrong with a man becoming intelligent and wanting to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world around him?"

She stared down at her work and I turned to leave. Without looking at me, she said: "It was evil when Eve listened to the snake and ate from the tree of knowledge. It was evil when she saw that she was naked. If not for that none of us would ever have to grow old and sick, and die."

Once again now I have the feeling of shame burning inside me. This intelligence has driven a wedge between me and all the people I once knew and loved. Before, they laughed at me and despised me for my ignorance and dullness; now, they hate me for my knowledge and understanding. What in God's name do they want of me?

They've driven me out of the factory. Now I'm more alone than ever before...

May 15 Dr. Strauss is very angry at me for not having written any progress reports in two weeks. He's justified because the lab is now paying me a regular salary. I told him I was too busy thinking and reading. When

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I pointed out that writing was such a slow process that it made me impatient with my poor handwriting, he suggested that I learn to type. It's much easier to write now because I can type nearly seventy-five words a minute. Dr. Strauss continually reminds me of the need to speak and write simply so that people will be able to understand me.

I'll try to review all the things that happened to me during the last two weeks. Algernon and I were presented to the American Psychological Association sitting in convention with the World Psychological Association last Tuesday. We created quite a sensation. Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss were proud of us.

I suspect that Dr. Nemur, who is sixty — ten years older than Dr. Strauss — finds it necessary to see tangible results of his work. Undoubtedly the result of pressure by Mrs. Nemur.

Contrary to my earlier impressions of him, I realize that Dr. Nemur is not at all a genius. He has a very good mind, but it struggles under the spectre of self-doubt. He wants people to take him for a genius. Therefore, it is important for him to feel that his work is accepted by the world. I believe that Dr. Nemur was afraid of further delay because he worried that someone else might make a discovery along these lines and take the credit from him.

Dr. Strauss on the other hand might be called a genius, although I feel that his areas of knowledge are too limited. He was educated in the tradition of narrow specialization; the broader aspects of background were neglected far more than necessary even for a neurosurgeon.

I was shocked to learn that the only ancient languages he could read were Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and that he knows almost nothing of mathematics beyond the elementary levels of the calculus of variations. When he admitted this to me, I found myself almost annoyed. It was as if he'd hidden this part of himself in order to deceive me, pretending — as do many people I've discovered — to be what he is not. No one I've ever known is what he appears to be on the surface.

Dr. Nemur appears to be uncomfortable around me. Sometimes when I try to talk to him, he just looks at me strangely and turns away. I was angry at first when Dr. Strauss told me I was giving Dr. Nemur an inferiority complex. I thought he was mocking me and I'm oversensitive at being made fun of.

How was I to know that a highly respected psychoexperimentalist

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like Nemur was unacquainted with Hindustani and Chinese? It's absurd when you consider the work that is being done in India and China today in the very field of his study.

I asked Dr. Strauss how Nemur could refute Rahajamati's attack on his method and results if Nemur couldn't even read them in the first place. That strange look on Dr. Strauss's face can mean only one of two things. Either he doesn't want to tell Nemur what they're saying in India, or else —and this worries me—Dr. Strauss doesn't know either. I must be careful to speak and write clearly and simply so that people won't laugh.

May 18 I am very disturbed. I saw Miss Kinnian last night for the first time in over a week. I tried to avoid all discussions of intellectual concepts and to keep the conversation on a simple, everyday level, but she just stared at me blankly and asked me what I meant about the mathematical variance equivalent in Dorbermann's *Fifth Concerto.*

When I tried to explain she stopped me and laughed. I guess I got angry, but I suspect I'm approaching her on the wrong level. No matter what I try to discuss with her, I am unable to communicate. I must review Vrostadt's equations on *Levels of Semantic Progression.* I find that I don't communicate with people much anymore. Thank God for books and music and things I can think about. I am alone in my apartment at Mrs. Flynn's boardinghouse most of the time and seldom speak to anyone.

May 20 I would not have noticed the new dishwasher, a boy of about sixteen, at the corner diner where I take my evening meals if not for the incident of the broken dishes. They crashed to the floor, shattering and sending bits of white china under the tables. The boy stood there, dazed and frightened, holding the empty tray in his hand. The whistles and catcalls from the customers (the cries of "hey, there go the profits!"... "*Mazeltov!*" ...and "well, he didn't work here very long..." which invariably seems to follow the breaking of glass or dishware in a public restaurant) all seemed to confuse him.

When the owner came to see what the excitement was about, the boy cowered as if he expected to be struck and threw up his arms as if to ward off the blow.

"All right! All right, you dope," shouted the owner, "don't just stand

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there! Get the broom and sweep that mess up. A broom...a broom, you idiot! It's in the kitchen. Sweep up all the pieces."

The boy saw that he was not going to be punished. His frightened expression disappeared and he smiled and hummed as he came back with the broom to sweep the floor. A few of the rowdier customers kept up the remarks, amusing themselves at his expense.

"Here, sonny, there's a nice piece behind you..."

"C'mon, do it again..."

"He's not so dumb. It's easier to break 'em than to wash 'em..."

As his vacant eyes moved across the crowd of amused onlookers, he slowly mirrored their smiles and finally broke into an uncertain grin at the joke which he obviously did not understand.

I felt sick inside as I looked at his dull, vacuous smile, the wide, bright eyes of a child, uncertain but eager to please. They were laughing at him because he was mentally retarded.

And I had been laughing at him too.

Suddenly, I was furious at myself and all those who were smirking at him. I jumped up and shouted, "Shut up! Leave him alone! It's not his fault he can't understand! He can't help what he is! But for God's sake...he's still a human being!"

The room grew silent. I cursed myself for losing control and creating a scene. I tried not to look at the boy as I paid my check and walked out without touching my food. I felt ashamed for both of us.

How strange it is that people of honest feelings and sensibility, who would not take advantage of a man born without arms or legs or eyes — how such people think nothing of abusing a man born with low intelligence. It infuriated me to think that not too long ago I, like this boy, had foolishly played the clown.

And I had almost forgotten.

I'd hidden the picture of the old Charlie Gordon from myself because now that I was intelligent it was something that had to be pushed out of my mind. But today in looking at that boy, for the first time I saw what I had been. *I was just like him!*

Only a short time ago, I learned that people laughed at me. Now I can see that unknowingly I joined with them in laughing at myself. That hurts most of all.

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I have often reread my progress reports and seen the illiteracy, the childish naïveté, the mind of low intelligence peering from a dark room, through the keyhole, at the dazzling light outside. I see that even in my dullness I knew that I was inferior, and that other people had something I lacked — something denied me. In my mental blindness, I thought that it was somehow connected with the ability to read and write, and I was sure that if I could get those skills I would automatically have intelligence too. Even a feeble-minded man wants to be like other men. A child may not know how to feed itself, or what to eat, yet it knows of hunger.

This then is what I was like, I never knew. Even with my gift of intellectual awareness, I never really knew.

This day was good for me. Seeing the past more clearly, I have decided to use my knowledge and skills to work in the field of increasing human intelligence levels. Who is better equipped for this work? Who else has lived in both worlds? These are my people. Let me use my gift to do something for them.

Tomorrow, I will discuss with Dr. Strauss the manner in which I can work in this area. I may be able to help him work out the problems of widespread use of the technique which was used on me. I have several good ideas of my own.

There is so much that might be done with this technique. If I could be made into a genius, what about thousands of others like myself? What fantastic levels might be achieved by using this technique on normal people? On geniuses?

There are so many doors to open. I am impatient to begin.

PROGRESS REPORT 13

May 23 It happened today. Algernon bit me. I visited the lab to see him as I do occasionally, and when I took him out of his cage, he snapped at my hand. I put him back and watched him for a while. He was unusually disturbed and vicious.

May 24 Burt, who is in charge of the experimental animals, tells me that Algernon is changing. He is less co-operative; he refuses to run the maze anymore; general motivation has decreased. And he hasn't been eating. Everyone is upset about what this may mean.

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May 25 They've been feeding Algernon, who now refuses to work the shifting-lock problem. Everyone identifies me with Algernon. In a way we're the first of our kind. They're all pretending that Algernon's behavior is not necessarily significant for me. But it's hard to hide the fact that some of the other animals who were used in this experiment are showing strange behavior.

Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur have asked me not to come to the lab anymore. I know what they're thinking but I can't accept it. I am going ahead with my plans to carry their research forward. With all due respect to both of these fine scientists, I am well aware of their limitations. If there is an answer, I'll have to find it out for myself. Suddenly, time has become very important to me.

May 29 I have been given a lab of my own and permission to go ahead with the research. I'm on to something. Working day and night. I've had a cot moved into the lab. Most of my writing time is spent on the notes which I keep in a separate folder, but from time to time I feel it necessary to put down my moods and my thoughts out of sheer habit.

I find the *calculus of intelligence* to be a fascinating study. Here is the place for the application of all the knowledge I have acquired. In a sense it's the problem I've been concerned with all my life.

May 31 Dr. Strauss thinks I'm working too hard. Dr. Nemur says I'm trying to cram a lifetime of research and thought into a few weeks. I know I should rest, but I'm driven on by something inside that won't let me stop. I've got to find the reason for the sharp regression in Algernon. I've got to know if and when it will happen to me.

June 4

LETTER TO DR. STRAUSS (copy)

Dear Dr. Strauss:

Under separate cover I am sending you a copy of my report entitled, "The Algernon-Gordon Effect: A Study of Structure and Function of Increased Intelligence," which I would like to have you read and have published.

As you see, my experiments are completed. I have included in my

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report all of my formulae, as well as mathematical analysis in the appendix. Of course, these should be verified.

Because of its importance to both you and Dr. Nemur (and need I say to myself, too?) I have checked and rechecked my results a dozen times in the hope of finding an error. I am sorry to say the results must stand. Yet for the sake of science, I am grateful for the little bit that I here add to the knowledge of the function of the human mind and of the laws governing the artificial increase of human intelligence.

I recall your once saying to me that an experimental *failure* or the *disproving* of a theory was as important to the advancement of learning as a success would be. I know now that this is true. I am sorry, however, that my own contribution to the field must rest upon the ashes of the work of two men I regard so highly.

Yours truly,

Charles Gordon

encl.:rept.

June 5 I must not become emotional. The facts and the results of my experiments are clear, and the more sensational aspects of my own rapid climb cannot obscure the fact that the tripling of intelligence by the surgical technique developed by Drs. Strauss and Nemur must be viewed as having little or no practical applicability (at the present time) to the increase of human intelligence.

As I review the records and data on Algernon, I see that although he is still in his physical infancy, he has regressed mentally. Motor activity is impaired; there is a general reduction of glandular activity; there is an accelerated loss of co-ordination. There are also strong indications of progressive amnesia.

As will be seen by my report, these and other physical and mental deterioration syndromes can be predicted with statistically significant results by the application of my formula.

The surgical stimulus to which we were both subjected has resulted in an intensification and acceleration of all mental processes. The unforeseen development, which I have taken the liberty of calling the *Algernon-*

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Gordon Effect, is the logical extension of the entire intelligence speed-up. The hypothesis here proven may be described simply in the following terms: Artificially increased intelligence deteriorates at a rate of time directly proportional to the quantity of the increase.

I feel that this, in itself, is an important discovery.

As long as I am able to write, I will continue to record my thoughts in these progress reports. It is one of my few pleasures. However, by all indications, my own mental deterioration will be very rapid.

I have already begun to notice signs of emotional instability and forgetfulness, the first symptoms of burnout.

June 10 Deterioration progressing. I have become absent-minded. Algernon died two days ago. Dissection shows my predictions were right. His brain has decreased in weight.

I guess the same thing is or will soon be happening to me. Now that it's definite, I don't want it to happen. I put Algernon's body in a cheese box and buried him in the back yard. I cried.

June 15 Dr. Strauss came to see me again. I wouldn't open the door and I told him to go away. I want to be left to myself. I have become touchy and irritable. I feel the darkness closing in. It's hard to throw off thoughts of suicide. I keep telling myself how important this introspective journal will be.

It's a strange sensation to pick up a book that you've read and enjoyed just a few months ago and discover that you don't remember it. I remembered how great I thought John Milton was, but when I picked up *Paradise Lost*, I couldn't understand it at all. I got so angry I threw the book across the room.

I've got to try to hold on to some of it. Some of the things I've learned. Oh, God, please don't take it all away.

June 19 Sometimes, at night, I go out for a walk. Last night I couldn't remember where I lived. A policeman took me home. I have the strange feeling that this has all happened to me before — a long time ago. I keep telling myself I'm the only person in the world who can describe what's happening to me.

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June 21 Why can't I remember? I've got to fight. I lie in bed for days and I don't know who or where I am. Then it all comes back to me in a flash. Fugues of amnesia. Symptoms of senility — second childhood. I can watch them coming on. It's so cruelly logical. I learned so much and so fast. Now my mind is deteriorating rapidly. I won't let it happen. I'll fight it. I can't help thinking of the boy in the restaurant, the blank expression, the silly smile, the people laughing at him. No — please — not that again....

June 22 I'm forgetting things that I learned recently. It seems to be following the classic pattern — the last things learned are the first things forgotten. Or is that the pattern?

I'd better look it up again....

I reread my paper on the *Algernon-Gordon Effect* and I get the strange feeling that it was written by someone else. There are parts I don't even understand.

Motor activity impaired. I keep tripping over things, and it becomes increasingly difficult to type.

June 23 I've given up using the typewriter completely. My coordination is bad. I feel that I'm moving slower and slower. Had a terrible shock today. I picked up a copy of an article I used in my research, Krueger's *Uber psychische Ganzheit,* to see if it would help me understand what I had done. First I thought there was something wrong with my eyes. Then I realized I could no longer read German. I tested myself in other languages. All gone.

June 30 A week since I dared to write again. It's slipping away like sand through my fingers. Most of the books I have are too hard for me now. I get angry with them because I know that I read and understood them just a few weeks ago.

I keep telling myself I must keep writing these reports so that somebody will know what is happening to me. But it gets harder to form the words and remember spellings. I have to look up even simple words in the dictionary now and it makes me impatient with myself.

Dr. Strauss comes around almost every day, but I told him I wouldn't

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see or speak to anybody. He feels guilty. They all do. But I don't blame anyone. I knew what might happen. But how it hurts.

July 7 I don't know where the week went. Today's Sunday I know becuase I can see through my window people going to church. I think I stayed in bed all week but I remember Mrs. Flynn bringing food to me a few times. I keep saying over and over ive got to do something but then I forget or maybe its just easier not to do what I say Im going to do.

I think of my mother and father a lot these days. I found a picture of them with me taken at a beach. My father has a big ball under his arm and my mother is holding me by the hand. I dont remember them the way they are in the picture. All I remember is my father drunk most of the time and arguing with mom about money.

He never shaved much and he used to scratch my face when he hugged me. My mother said he died but Cousin Miltie said he heard his mom and dad say that my father ran away with another woman. When I asked my mother she slapped my face and said my father was dead. I dont think I ever found out which was true but I don't care much. (He said he was going to take me to see cows on a farm once but he never did. He never kept his promises...)

July 10 My landlady Mrs Flynn is very worried about me. She says the way I lay around all day and dont do anything I remind her of her son before she threw him out of the house. She said she doesnt like loafers. If Im sick its one thing, but if Im a loafer thats another thing and she wont have it. I told her I think Im sick.

I try to read a little bit every day, mostly stories, but sometimes I have to read the same thing over and over again because I dont know what it means. And its hard to write. I know I should look up all the words in the dictionary but its so hard and Im so tired all the time.

Then I got the idea that I would only use the easy words instead of the long hard ones. That saves time. I put flowers on Algernons grave about once a week. Mrs Flynn thinks Im crazy to put flowers on a mouses grave but I told her that Algernon was special.

July 14 Its sunday again. I dont have anything to do to keep me busy

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now because my television set is broke and I dont have any money to get it fixed. (I think I lost this months check from the lab. I dont remember)

I get awful headaches and asperin doesnt help me much. Mrs Flynn knows Im really sick and she feels very sorry for me. Shes a wonderful woman whenever someone is sick.

July 22 Mrs Flynn called a strange doctor to see me. She was afraid I was going to die. I told the doctor I wasnt too sick and that I only forget sometimes. He asked me did I have any friends or relatives and I said no I dont have any. I told him I had a friend called Algernon once but he was a mouse and we used to run races together. He looked at me kind of funny like he thought I was crazy.

He smiled when I told him I used to be a genius. He talked to me like I was a baby and he winked at Mrs Flynn. I got mad and chased him out because he was making fun of me the way they all used to.

July 24 I have no more money and Mrs Flynn says I got to go to work somewhere and pay the rent because I havent paid for over two months. I dont know any work but the job I used to have at Donnegans Plastic Box Company I dont want to go back there because they all knew me when I was smart and maybe theyll laugh at me. But I dont know what else to do to get money.

July 25 I was looking at some of my old progress reports and its very funny but I cant read what I wrote. I can make out some of the words but they dont make sense.

Miss Kinnian came to the door but I said go away I dont want to see you. She cried and I cried too but I wouldnt let her in because I didnt want her to laugh at me. I told her I didn't like her any more. I told her I didnt want to be smart any more. Thats not true. I still love her and I still want to be smart but I had to say that so shed go away. She gave Mrs Flynn money to pay the rent. I dont want that. I got to get a job.

Please...please let me not forget how to read and write...

July 27 Mr Donnegan was very nice when I came back and asked him for my old job of janitor. First he was very suspicious but I told him what

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happened to me then he looked very sad and put his hand on my shoulder and said Charlie Gordon you got guts.

Everybody looked at me when I came downstairs and started working in the toilet sweeping it out like I used to. I told myself Charlie if they make fun of you dont get sore because you remember their not so smart as you once thot they were. And besides they were once your friends and if they laughed at you that doesnt mean anything because they liked you too.

One of the new men who came to work there after I went away made a nasty crack he said hey Charlie I hear your a very smart fella a real quiz kid. Say something intelligent. I felt bad but Joe Carp came over and grabbed him by the shirt and said leave him alone you lousy cracker or Ill break your neck. I didnt expect Joe to take my part so I guess hes really my friend.

Later Frank Reilly came over and said Charlie if anybody bothers you or trys to take advantage you call me or Joe and we will set em straight. I said thanks Frank and I got choked up so I had to turn around and go into the supply room so he wouldnt see me cry. Its good to have friends.

July 28 I did a dumb thing today I forgot I wasnt in Miss Kinnians class at the adult center any more like I use to be. I went in and sat down in my old seat in the back of the room and she looked at me funny and she said Charles. I dint remember she ever called me that before only Charlie so I said hello Miss Kinnian Im redy for my lesin today only I lost my reader that we was using. She startid to cry and run out of the room and everybody looked at me and I saw they wasnt the same pepul who used to be in my class.

Then all of a suddin I rememberd some things about the operashun and me getting smart and I said holy smoke I reely pulled a Charlie Gordon that time. I went away before she come back to the room.

Thats why Im going away from New York for good. I dont want to do nothing like that agen. I dont want Miss Kinnian to feel sorry for me. Evry body feels sorry at the factery and I dont want that eather so Im going someplace where nobody knows that Charlie Gordon was once a genus and now he cant even reed a book or rite good.

Im taking a cuple of books along and even if I cant reed them Ill

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practise hard and maybe I wont forget every thing I lerned. If I try reel hard maybe Ill be a littel bit smarter then I was before the operashun. I got my rabits foot and my luky penny and maybe they will help me.

If you ever reed this Miss Kinnian dont be sorry for me Im glad I got a second chanse to be smart becaus I lerned a lot of things that I never even new were in this world and Im grateful that I saw it all for a littel bit. I dont know why Im dumb agen or what I did wrong maybe its becaus I dint try hard enuff. But if I try and practis very hard maybe Ill get a littl smarter and know what all the words are. I remember a littel bit how nice I had a feeling with the blue book that has the torn cover when I red it. Thats why Im gonna keep trying to get smart so I can have that feeling agen. Its a good feeling to know things and be smart. I wish I had it rite now if I did I would sit down and reed all the time. Anyway I bet Im the first dumb person in the world who ever found out somthing importent for sience. I remember I did somthing but I dont remember what. So I gess its like I did it for all the dumb pepul like me.

Good-by Miss Kinnian and Dr Strauss and evreybody.

And P.S. please tell Dr Nemur not to be such a grouch when pepul laff at him and he woud have more frends. Its easy to make frends if you let pepul laff at you. Im going to have lots of frends where I go.

P.P.S. Please if you get a chanse put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard...

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Daniel Keyes is the author of four novels and several books of nonfiction, but odds are good that he'll always be known best as the man who created "Flowers for Algernon." His most recent book delightfully traces the roots of the story and then lets us watch it blossom and grow from a magazine story to a play, a novel, and then a movie, a dramatic musical...and now a second film version (starring Matthew Modine) just aired on CBS-TV. This article excerpts five of the book's twenty-three chapters and picks up in the midst of the story. After a stint in the U.S. Maritime Service and four years of college in Brooklyn, Mr. Keyes moved to Manhattan in pursuit of his dream of being a writer. Here—let him tell you:

Algernon, Charlie, and I: A Writer's Journey

By Daniel Keyes

Editing Pulps and Writing Comic Books

ONE FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN 1950, I got a call from Lester del Rey. He wanted to know if I was interested in a job as associate fiction editor for a chain of pulp magazines — the popular fiction magazines of the day, printed on cheap untrimmed stock that left paper dandruff all over your dark clothing.

"I don't understand," I said.

"Well, my agent, Scott Meredith, has heard of an opening at Stadium Publications. The editor, Bob Erisman, works out of his home in Connecticut, and comes into New York only on Fridays to pick up the edited stories. His associate editor quit without notice, and Bob's desperate for a replacement. I told Scott that even though you haven't published yet, you have a good story sense and might be able to handle the job. He's willing to recommend you. It pays fifty dollars a week."

"How can Meredith recommend me? He's never even met me."

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Lester paused. "Don't ask any questions. If you want the job just get over here quick."

Within a week I was editing ten pulp magazines from Stadium Publications offices on the sixteenth floor of the Empire State Building. I selected, bought, and edited stories for nine westerns and sports titles, and one science fiction magazine called *Marvel Science Fiction*.

Several months later, when the advertising department called and said a last-minute ad cancellation had left a 3,000-word hole in one of the westerns, I filled in by submitting a short-short under a pseudonym through an agent. Although Erisman hated that first cliché-ridden western yarn, he eventually agreed that the young writer I had taken under my wing was coming along nicely.

"His style has improved: no more clichés, tighter prose, cleaner plot. Your young writer spins a good yarn. There's even a hint of characterization."

But I still hadn't published anything under my own name.

In the Spring of 1952, I was asked by the editor of *Other Worlds Science Stories* to submit a story for a special "All Star Editor Issue!" It was going to feature six stories by science fiction editors. If they bought my story, I would be paid two cents a word.

I thought of the "Guinea Pig" idea, about increasing human intelligence through surgery, but I sensed it would be a complex story. I didn't feel ready to write it, so I put it out of my mind and kept searching.

I found another idea in my note folder. What if a slave-robot was emancipated? How would it deal with anti-robot prejudice? How would he support himself?

In the same folder, I saw a note. "*Algernon Charles Swinburne. Odd first name.*" Maybe I would name the first free robot Algernon. I decided, instead, to name the robot — Robert.

I mentioned the emancipated robot concept to Lester del Rey over coffee, and he offered me fifty dollars for the idea. It was tempting, but I figured if Lester was willing to buy it, it must be worth writing.

"Robot Unwanted," my first real publication under my own name, was the lead story in the issue. It was 5,000 words long, and the check, after a 10 percent deduction for the agent's fee, was for $90.

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The one copy I still have is on crumbling pulp paper, and as I open to it the page comes loose. The blurb reads: *"Robert was the only one on Earth — an F.R. That meant he was a free robot; free to do anything he wanted — but he didn't want to die!"*

For a writer, there is no feeling to match the elation that comes from seeing your name in print under the title of your first published work. As you walk the streets of Manhattan, you wonder why people aren't rushing up to ask for your autograph. You toy with the idea of quitting your job and writing full time for fame and fortune.

When the rejections of other stories keep coming, you drift back down to earth.

But some people in the closely knit science fiction writing and publishing community took note. Many sf editors, agents and writers had known each other as fans in the early years. One such group called itself The Hydra Club. I had met many of its members and was often invited to their parties, but I was too young to be accepted into this circle.

One Friday afternoon, after the publication of "Robot Unwanted" I got a phone call, inviting me to join a poker game at the home of H. L. Gold, which was also the office of *Galaxy*, the magazine he edited. I'd heard stories that since his return from World War II duty, Horace had developed agoraphobia, and rarely left his home-office.

As a way of socializing with other writers, editors and agents, he had set up a regular Friday night nickel-dime poker game at his New York apartment. It wasn't the Deux-Magots in Paris or the "Algonquin Round Table" in New York, but for a wannabe author it was exhilarating to be among people devoted to writing.

Players would drop in any time, from after-dinner until breakfast. We played games like High-Low Seven-Card Stud, Anaconda, and Iron Cross. And until I learned the subtleties of the games and the people at the table — when to bluff, when to fold — the tuition fee in this poker seminar left a gap in my fifty-dollar-a-week paycheck.

By 1953, the pulps suffered a serious decline in readership as a result of the new paperback books and television, and since Stadium Publications had to cut expenses, they gave me notice. Erisman would have to handle all the magazines by himself, using the house-name Arthur Lane

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to give the impression that a staff was still operating. The pulps soon vanished except for some of the science fiction magazines, like *Galaxy*, *Astounding*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

A few days before my job was terminated, Bob Erisman and I had lunch at Child's in the Empire State Building. We reminisced about working together. I leaned back after coffee and said, "Bob, I have a confession to make."

His eyebrows went up.

"Remember that writer whose stories you hated at first, and I told you I saw some talent in him?"

"You mean 'Bushwack at Aransas Pass'?"

"Yeah. Well, I used a pen name and submitted that and all those other stories through an agent. I wanted you to know."

Bob smiled. "I guess confession is good for the soul. Remember those western and sports novels and novellas you weren't permitted to buy because they were written under contract?"

"Sure."

"Well, what do you think I was doing at home in Mystic, Connecticut, after I checked your work and wrote blurbs and titles?"

"You?"

He nodded.

We had a drink together and toasted the end of an era.

In contrast to the decline of the pulps, Martin Goodman Publications' subsidiary, *Timely Comics*, was flourishing. Goodman offered me a transfer, a job working for his son-in-law Stan Lee, who was in charge of the comic book line and has since become the head of a multi-million dollar corporation called Marvel. Since my $17.25 a month rent was almost due, I accepted what I considered a detour on my journey toward a literary career.

Stan Lee was a lanky, shy young man who kept pretty much to himself and let his editors deal with the scriptwriters, cartoonists and lettering crew. Writers turned in plot synopses. Stan read them, and as a matter of course, would accept one or two from each of the regulars he referred to as his "stable." As one of his front men, I would pass along the comments and criticism. The writers would then develop them in script

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form, with dialogue, and actions for each panel, much like movie screenplays.

Because of my experience editing *Marvel*, and because I'd sold a few science fiction stories by then, Stan allowed me to specialize in the horror, fantasy, suspense, and science fiction comic books. Naturally, I began submitting story ideas, getting freelance assignments, and supplementing my salary by writing the scripts on my own time.

One of the ideas I wrote, but didn't submit to him, I called "Brainstorm." It started out:

> The first guy in the test to raise the I.Q. from a low normal 90 to genius level...He goes through the experience, and then is thrown back to what he was...he is no brighter than he was before, but having had a sample of light, he can never be the same. The pathos of a man who knows what it is to be brilliant and to know that he can never again have the things that he tasted for the first time, including a brilliant, beautiful woman he fell in love with and with whom he can no longer have any contact.

I didn't submit it to Stan Lee because something told me it should be more than a comic book script. I knew I would do it someday after I learned how to write.

In the fall of 1952, in violation of Commandment Three: "Thou shalt not marry while in psychotherapy," I proposed to Aurea and she accepted.

When I told Stan Lee about it, he rubbed his hands together and gloated. "That's great, Dan. Get married. Buy a house, take on a big mortgage. Buy a fancy car. Then you won't be so independent."

My friend Morton Klass and his brother Phil (who published stories under the pseudonym William Tenn) threw rice at Aurea and me as we left City Hall. A big wedding party at Peter Fland's Studio. Models and friends and a few relatives. The wedding cake was a cheesecake from "Lindy's."

We didn't buy a house. We moved into my coldwater bachelor pad. Aurea was still working for Peter Fland, and I was once again trying to rewrite my Merchant Marine novel while freelancing scripts for Stan.

A few months later, Aurea phoned, sounding upset. "Peter and his

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new partner are arguing. I think they're going to break up. You'd better come over and see that I get paid."

I left my writing desk, and went to the studio. Before the day was over, Aurea had left Fland. The partner had offered us a deal. He wanted Aurea as a photographer and fashion stylist and me as an advertising copywriter and salesman. We invested our savings in the fashion photography business and celebrated dreams of success.

Our partner, I soon discovered, seemed to be an incorrigible liar — at least that's what I believed at the time. I survived the year only by assuming that when he said it was nighttime, it was really daytime. The dream of business success turned into a recurrent nightmare. The partner is standing in front of me on a subway platform. I feel a rage...I raise both hands and step forward...Then another train, the elevated train of my childhood, thunders past my bed and I pull back, turn away and hide under the covers. Never mind. I sold out to him, and we lost the savings we invested in the company.

No longer able to afford twice-weekly psychoanalysis sessions, I violated the Fourth Commandment by giving my therapist one fifty-minute-hour's notice.

I heard his voice from behind — actually speaking to me!

"You are a great mistake making. You, the rules knew when we started. You must pay for whatever appointments you for the rest of the month don't keep."

I got off the couch, looked him in the eye and paid him. "Thanks for the memories."

I see now that my ex-shrink was probably the model for Dr. Strauss.

For the purpose of exploring the writing life, let's set aside the current arguments for or against psychoanalysis. Over the years, as a writer, I have come to believe strongly in two of Freud's ideas: the power of the *unconscious* as a motivating force directing behavior, and his method of *free-association* to plumb subconscious connections.

Since most writers use their own experiences to breathe life into their characters, and to create believable settings and actions, those two concepts provided me with ways to explore a lifetime accumulation of material, as well as the tools with which to retrieve them. My dream of

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becoming a writer grew out of my love of books and storytelling, but the only material I can really call my own, is stored deep in the unconscious area of my root cellar. I use free-association like a gardener's spade to dig out connected memories, bring them into the light and replant them where they can bloom.

Many years later, when I was developing the novel version of *Flowers for Algernon*, I felt the book needed a psychoanalytic session between Dr. Strauss and Charlie. I struggled with it. Then, frustrated, I put it out of my mind. A few weeks later, I awoke early one morning, feeling the answer surfacing in my mind — coming close to the barrier. I lay there until the mental pictures came through — myself stretched out on my analyst's couch fighting to break through the "Monday Morning Crust."

Although I didn't know it at the time, my shrink had earned his fee. To write the scene, I just gave that memory to Charlie.

Looking for Charlie

During the next few months, the idea of artificially increasing human intelligence surfaced in my mind many times. It was a period of false starts, experiments, trial and error. Some of the early notes suggest opening episodes and different names for the main character.

* * *

An officer recommends his cousin for the experiment of having his I.Q. changed. Walton is a bachelor who has long been in love with a girl who works in the tapes library...

* * *

Steve Dekker has been in and out of prison more times than he can count. It seems that practically every time he pulls a job he gets caught. He has this self-defeating kind of personality that ends up in failure. He decides that this is because he's not smart enough — also there's a girl he's nuts about who won't give him a tumble, because he's not bright. So when he reads an article about making animals smarter he barges in and offers himself as a guinea-pig for brain surgery.

* * *

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The story of raising Flint Gargan's I.Q. Flint is a guy who is crude, enjoys scrawling dirty pix on bathroom walls, fights at the drop of a syllable...he's also filled with corny emotions, cries over sentimental gush, loves weddings, babies, dogs — has his own dog.

Flint hated school when he was a boy, left school to go out on his own as a plumber's helper...figures school's not so bad for some, but doesn't think that he would have been helped much by it.

I try not to edit or judge while I'm writing. I let the raw material pour out, and if I feel it's good, I shape it later. But I didn't like Steve Dekker or Flint Gargan, and I wanted nothing more to do with them, or the dozens of other characters that appeared on my pages. I was searching my memory, my feelings, the world around me, for a clue to the character of this story.

I soon realized that part of my problem was that the story idea — the "What would happen if?..." — had come first, and now I was trying to cast an actor to play the role without knowing what he was like.

I decided to try working from the events that stemmed from the idea, and let the character evolve from the story.

The plot was developing through a sequence of connected episodes, the cause and effect chain of events, embodying what we call form or structure. But I was a long, long way from a story.

I tried starting later in the narrative, remembering Homer's epic strategy of starting "in the middle of the action," as in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Three days later they wheeled him into the operating room of the Institute. He lifted himself up on one elbow and waved to Linda who had supervised his preparation.

"Wish me luck, beautiful," he said.

She laughed. "You'll be all right." Dr. Brock's eyes smiled down at him from behind his surgical mask.

The fragment breaks off there, but if I were the editor, I'd have blue-penciled this with a note to the writer: "'*Smiling eyes?*' Watch your clichés. '*From behind his surgical mask?*'" If his eyes are smiling from behind the mask then he's going to operate blindfolded!

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Still, part of that passage later found its way into the published novelet.

There are about twenty such attempts at beginnings, over several months. I had an idea I cared about. And a story line, and a few passages. But I still didn't have the character I felt was right. I was searching for a protagonist who would be memorable and with whom the reader and I could identify; someone with a strong motivation and goal who evoked a response from other characters; someone whose inner life gave him a human dimension.

Where would I find such a character? How could I invent and develop him? I hadn't the slightest idea.

Then, months later, he walked into my life and turned it around.

Charlie Finds Me

It happened in Brooklyn. Aurea and I moved back there, across the street from my parents' apartment, on the street where I'd grown up. We were broke. Aurea did freelance fashion styling and I resumed writing scripts for Stan Lee. Hundreds of them.

I took courses at night for a Masters Degree in American Literature to prepare myself for a teaching license as a way to buy my freedom from script writing. I passed the Board of Education exam for Substitute Teacher, then taught at the high school, from which I'd graduated ten years earlier.

I wrote nights, during the Christmas break, and summers. In 1956, I finished "The Trouble with Elmo," a science fiction story about a chess-playing super computer created to solve all the crises in the world. But the computer has figured out that when there are no more problems to solve, it will be destroyed. So Elmo solves every problem, but embeds what we would now call a computer "worm" or "Trojan Horse" containing a program that creates new world crises for it to solve. "The Trouble with Elmo" appeared in *Galaxy* magazine.

I passed the New York Board of Education exam for an English teacher's license in June of 1957. With my higher salary as a regular teacher, Aurea and I were able to rent a one-bedroom house in Seagate, a

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gated community at the western tip of Coney Island. I loved strolling the beach, smelling the salt air, looking out at the ocean and recalling my seafaring days. I set up my typewriter and desk in a corner of the bedroom, confident I'd be able to write in this place.

The following school term, the Chairman of the English department, impressed with my four published short stories, assigned me to teach two elective classes of creative writing. Each class was limited to twenty-five gifted students, all of whom loved reading and wanted to be writers. But many of them acted as if they deserved to have success handed to them because of their intelligence. When they groaned at the assignments and disdained revising their work, I told them, "There are those people *who want to write*, and others who *want to be writers*. For some geniuses, success comes without labor. For the rest of us, it's the love of writing that counts."

As if to compensate for these two "special classes," my other two classes were Special Modified English for low I.Q. students. For them, I was expected to concentrate on spelling, sentence structure, and developing paragraphs. Class discussions focused on issues of the day that might interest them. The key to teaching the "special" students in "modified classes," I was told, is to motivate them with things relevant to their own lives.

I will never forget my first day of teaching one of the Special Modified English classes. I can still see the boy, in the rear of the room near the window. When the school bell rings at the end of the 50-minute hour, students jump up and rush out — except that boy, who lumbers towards my desk. He wears a black parka, with the orange letter "J."

"Mr. Keyes...Can I ask you something?"

"Sure. You on the football team?"

"Yeah. Linebacker. Look, Mr. Keyes, this is a dummy class, ain't it?"

I'm taken aback. "What?"

"A dummy class...for stupid people:..."

Not knowing how to react, I mumble, "No...not really...It's just *special* and *modified*. We go a little slower than some of the other — "

"I know this is a dummy class, and I wanted to ask you. *If I try hard and I get smart by the end of the term, will you put me in a regular class? I want to be smart.*"

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"Sure," I say, not knowing if I really have the authority. "Let's see what happens."

When I get home that evening, I try to work on a story I've started, but the boy keeps intruding. His words: *"I want to be smart"* haunt me to this day. It never occurred to me that a developmentally challenged person — in those days they called it retarded — would be aware of his or her limitations and might want to be more intelligent.

I began to write about him.

Short story of a boy in a modified class who begins to realize that he's a "dummy." Teacher's point of view. Donald...Title: "The Gifted and the Slow."

Two children who grow up near each other — one clever and the other dull. A slow child's deterioration a reflection of the entire culture. Stuart who is struggling against the knowledge that he is slow — Donald who abuses his intelligence.

* * *

A boy in a modified class — in love with a bright girl who — up to this point — doesn't understand the differences in intelligence. As each one becomes aware...He had been placed in this class after he became a behavior problem. He was in a gang of boys called the Cormorants.

* * *

His teacher is a new, beginning teacher who has ideals and aspirations — and who believes that Corey can be straightened out. Corey is a neurotic boy — very bright but very disturbed. Bright boy comes into conflict with dull boy over a girl. The dull boy kills the bright boy in a fight.

And so on...and so on...and so on...It was going nowhere. I put the notes away and forgot about them.

I decided to write a novel based on my experiences in the fashion photography business with Aurea and the partner who, I felt, nearly drove both of us crazy. She suggested that I take a leave of absence from teaching, and write full time while she freelanced as a fashion stylist in Manhattan.

It went well. I was a night writer in those days, and the sound of my

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Royal typewriter in the bedroom lulled Aurea to sleep. In fact, if I stopped typing for too long she would awaken and mumble, "What's the matter?"

We'd have breakfast together, and then I would drive her to the train station on the back of my red Cushman scooter. I'd come back to the apartment for my day's sleep. Then I'd pick her up in the evening. We'd have dinner together. She would go to sleep, and I'd sit down at the typewriter in a corner of the bedroom.

I don't recall how long it took me to write the first draft of that fashion photography novel, but I do remember that after I put it away for a few days, and then reread it, I was sick to my stomach. It was so bad.

I became depressed, frustrated and demoralized — on the verge of giving up writing altogether.

Then, in the summer of 1958, H. L. Gold phoned and asked me to write a second story for *Galaxy* to follow "The Trouble with Elmo."

"I'll try, Horace. I've got an idea."

"Well, get it to me as soon as you can."

It's amazing how quickly depression, frustration and demoralization can melt away when an editor asks a struggling writer for a story. I searched my files and notebooks.

There was an old, yellowed page from my first year at NYU with the line: "*I wonder what would happen if we could increase human intelligence artificially?*" The line, I remembered, had been accompanied by a depressing vision on the subway — *the wedge that education has driven between me and my family.*

How often those thoughts have come back to me. I reread my notes and scraps about the operation to increase the I.Q., and the story idea, and the shape it might take — the plot of a classic tragedy.

Recalling Aristotle's dictum in his *Poetics*, that a tragedy can happen only to the highborn, because there can be a tragic fall only from a great height, I thought, let's test that. What if someone the world views as the lowest of the low, a mentally handicapped young man, climbs to the peak of Book Mountain, the heights of genius? And then loses it all. I felt myself choking up as I thought about it.

Okay, I've got the idea, and the plot, I thought, but I still don't have the character with motivation.

I opened a more recent folder, turned several pages and saw the note:

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A boy comes up to me in the Special Modified English class and says, "I want to be smart."

Stunned, I stared at those pages, side by side. A motivation collided with a *"What would happen if...?"*

I glanced at Aurea, tossing restlessly in bed. I pushed my note folders aside ready to begin again. I needed new names. In the city she'd worked for the Larry Gordon Studio. Aurea's last boyfriend before we got married, my rival — his first name was Charlie.

I typed. Aurea sighed at the sound, and soon she was fast asleep.

Charlie Gordon — whoever you are, wherever you are — I hear you. I hear your voice calling out, *"Mr. Keyes, I want to be smart."*

Okay, Charlie Gordon, you want to be smart? I'll make you smart. Here I come, ready or not.

Getting There

I typed the following opening pages in one sitting, pounding away on the keys with more excitement writing than I'd ever known before. Here is the unedited first draft:

"The Genius Effect"
by Daniel Keyes

"What makes Gordon, here, ideal for the experiment," said Dr. Strauss, "is that he has a low intelligence level and he's eager and willing to be made a guinea pig."

Charlie Gordon smiled and sat forward on the edge of his chair to hear what Dr. Nemur would answer to that.

"You may be right, Strauss, but he's such a small, frail looking thing. Can he take it, physically? We have no idea how much of a shock it will be to the human nervous system to have the intelligence level tripled in such a short time."

"I'm healthy," offered Charlie Gordon, rising and pounding on his slight chest. "I been working since I was a kid, and — "

"Yes, we know all about that, Charlie," said Dr. Strauss, motioning

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for Charlie to reseat himself. "What Doctor Nemur means is something else. It's too complicated to explain to you right now. Just relax, Charlie."

Turning his attention back to his colleague, Dr. Strauss continued: "I know he's not what you had in mind as the first of your new breed of intellectual supermen, but volunteers with seventy I.Q. are not easy to find. Most people of his low mentality are hostile and uncooperative. An I.Q. of seventy usually means a dullness that's hard to reach.

"Charlie has a good nature and he's interested and eager to please. He knows that he's not bright, and he's begged me for the chance to serve as the subject of our experiment. You can't discount the value of motivation. You may be sure of yourself, Nemur, but you've got to remember that this will be the first human being ever to have his intelligence raised by surgical means."

Charlie didn't understand most of what Dr. Strauss was saying, but it sounded as if he were on his side. He held his breath as he waited for Dr. Nemur's answer. In awe, he watched the white-haired genius pull his upper lip over his lower one, scratch his ear and rub his nose. Then finally it came — a nod.

"All right," said Nemur, "we'll try him. Put him through the personality tests. I'll want a complete profile as soon as possible."

Unable to contain himself, Charlie Gordon leaped to his feet and reached across the desk to pump Dr. Nemur's hand. "Thank you, Doc, thank you. You won't be sorry for giving me a chance. I'll try hard to be smart. I'll try awful hard."

The first of the testers to encounter Charlie Gordon was a young Rorschach specialist who attempted to get a deeper insight into Charlie's personality.

"Now, Mr. Gordon," said the thin young man, pushing his glasses back on the bridge of his nose, "just tell me what you see on this card."

Charlie, who approached each new test with tension and the memory of many childhood failures, peered at the card suspiciously. "An inkblot."

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"Yes, of course," smiled the tester.

Charlie got up to leave. "That's a nice hobby. I have a hobby too. I paint pictures, you know they have the numbers where you put the different colors — "

"Please, Mr. Gordon. Sit down. We're not through yet. Now what does it make you think of? What do you see in the inkblot?"

Charlie leaned closer to the card and stared at it intently. He took it from the tester's hand and held it close up. Then he held it far away from him glancing up at the young man out of the corner of his eye, hoping to get a hint. Suddenly, he was on his feet, heading out the door.

"Where are you going, Mr. Gordon?"

"To get my glasses."

When Charlie returned from the locker where he had left his glasses in his coat pocket, he explained. "I usually only have to use my glasses when I go to the movies or watch television, but they're really good ones. Let me see that card again. I'll bet I find it now."

Picking up the card again, he stared at it in disbelief. He was sure that he'd be able to see anything there with his glasses on. He strained and frowned and bit his nails. He wanted desperately to see what it was that the tester wanted him to find in that mass of inkblot. "It's an inkblot..." he said, but seeing the look of dismay on the young man's face, he quickly added, "but it's a nice one. Very pretty with these little things on the edges and..."He saw the young psychologist shaking his head and he let his voice trail off. Obviously he hadn't gotten it right.

"Mr. Gordon, now we know it's an inkblot. What I want you to tell me is what it makes you think of. What do you visualize — I mean what do you see in your mind when you look at it?"

"Let me try again," pleaded Charlie. "I'll get it in a few minutes. I'm not so fast sometimes. I'm a very slow reader too, but I'm trying hard." He took the card again and traced the outline of the blot for several minutes, his forehead knit in deep thought. "What does it remind me of? What does it remind me of...?" he mused to himself. Suddenly his forehead cleared. The young man leaned forward expectantly as Gordon said, "Sure — of course — what a dope I am. I should have thought of it before."

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"Does it make you think of something?"

"Yes," said Charlie triumphantly, a knowing smile illuminating his face. "A fountain pen...leaking ink all over the tablecloth."

During the Thematic Apperception Test, in which he was asked to make up stories about the people and things he saw in a series of photographs, he ran into further difficulty.

" — I know you never met these people before," said the young woman who had done her Ph.D. work at Columbia, "I've never met them either. Just pretend that you — "

"Then if I never met them, how can I tell you stories about them? Now I've got some pictures of my mother and father and my little nephew Miltie. I could tell you stories about Miltie..."

He could tell by the way she was shaking her head sadly that she didn't want to hear stories about Miltie. He began to wonder what was wrong with all these people who asked him to do such strange things.

Charlie was miserable during the nonverbal intelligence tests. He was beaten ten times out of ten by a group of white mice who learned to work their way out of a maze before he did. It depressed him to learn that mice were so smart.

I remember typing that opening fragment. I saw myself writing my homework, the ink dripping from my pen, making an inkblot on the white paper, my mother's hand coming over my shoulder and ripping out the page. I laughed out loud as I saw it happening to Charlie, saw his reaction, heard his words. There was no thinking ahead. It was as if the sentences were flowing from my fingertips to the typewriter keys without passing through my brain. Something inside told me I had it. I finally had it.

Henry James wrote of the donnée — "the given" — as being the heart of the work given to the writer. Well, a boy had walked up to me and given me what I needed to spark the story, and, in return, I would give him some of my own memories to bring his character to life on the page.

Charlie's story had begun to tell itself. It felt right. It felt good.

Yet, the next evening, when I sat down to work, I couldn't go on. Something was blocking me. What? I knew the idea was original; I felt it was important; It had stayed with me over the years and demanded to be written. What was wrong?

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As I reread the pages, I laughed aloud at Charlie's responses to the inkblot. Then, suddenly, it hit me. I was laughing at Charlie. The way I was telling the story, the reader would be laughing at Charlie. That's what most people did when they saw the mentally disadvantaged make mistakes. It was a way of making themselves feel superior. I remembered the day I broke the dishes, and the customers laughed and Mr. Goldstein called me *moron*.

I didn't want my readers to laugh at Charlie. Maybe laugh *with* him, but not at him.

Sure, I had the idea, and the plot, and the character, but I hadn't found the right way, the only way, to tell the story. The point of view, or what I prefer to call the *angle of vision*, was wrong. This had to be told from Charlie's perspective. It had to be first person, major character angle — in Charlie's mind and through Charlie's eyes all the way.

But how? What narrative strategy would let the story unfold?

Would the reader believe that a developmentally disadvantaged person could write this as a memoir from beginning to end? I couldn't believe that myself. I liked the idea of each event, each scene, being recorded as it was happening, or right after it had happened. Diary? Again, not plausible that — at least in the beginning and at the end — Charlie would sit down and make long journal entries.

I struggled with the narrative strategy for several days, growing more and more frustrated, because I felt I was so close to unlocking the story. Then one morning I awoke with the answer in my mind. As part of the experiment, Charlie would be asked to keep an ongoing record, a progress report.

I had never heard the term before, or read a story or novel in which it had been used. I suspected that I was developing a unique point of view.

Now that I had found Charlie's voice, I knew he would tell it through my fingers on the keys. But how would I handle the sentence structure and spelling? Students in my modified classes provided the model. How would I know how he thought? I would try to remember what it was like to be a child. How would I know his feelings? I would give him my feelings.

When Flaubert was asked how he could have imagined and written of life through the mind of a woman in *Madam Bovary*, his answer was: "*I am Madame Bovary.*"

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In that sense, I gave Charlie Gordon some of myself, and I became part of that character.

Still, I was worried about opening with the illiterate spelling and short, childish sentence structure. I wondered about the reader's reaction. Then I remembered what Mark Twain did in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Before plunging into the vernacular of the uneducated Huck, Twain alerts the reader with the author's educated voice.

The novel opens with a "NOTICE": "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

"BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR, Per G. G., Chief of Ordnance."

This is followed by an EXPLANATORY:

"In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect, the extremist form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect, the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect, and four modified varieties of this last..." signed "THE AUTHOR."

Only then, after having prepared the reader, does Twain begin the first person narrative from Huck's point of view and in his voice.

"*You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of* The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, *but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.*"

I decided to follow Twain's strategy. My original opening — which I later deleted and can no longer find — begins with Alice Kinnian coming to the lab and asking Professor Nemur if he has heard from Charlie. Nemur hands her the manuscript, the first pages of which are written in pencil, pressed so hard she can feel the words raised on the back of the paper.

Only then does Charlie's voice take over as I type:

progris riport 1 — martch 5

Dr. Strauss says I shud rite down what I think and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont know why but he says its importint so they will see if they will use me. I hope they use me. Miss Kinnian says maybe they can make me smart. I want to be

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smart. My name is Charlie Gordon. I am 37 years old and 2 weeks ago was my brithday. I have nuthing more to rite now so I will close for today.

When I saw those words on the page, I knew I had it. I wrote through that night and the nights that followed, feverishly, long hours, little sleep and lots of coffee.

Then, in the middle of the night, partway through the first draft, after the scene in which Charlie races the white mouse, I called out loud, "*The mouse! The mouse!*"

Aurea jumped up, startled. "Where? Where?"

I explained and she smiled sleepily, "Oh, good."

I turned back to the typewriter and typed a note to myself:

The mouse, having had the same treatment as Charlie, will forecast events connected with the experiment. It will be a character in its own right, and a furry little sidekick for Charlie.

A name — I had to give the mouse a name. My fingers went over the keys. It just appeared on the page.

Algernon.

After that, the story wrote itself, about thirty thousand words — what would be called a long novelet or a short novella.

In that first complete draft, the story ends with Alice Kinnian looking up from the folder of progress reports with tears in her eyes, and asking Professor Nemur to go with her to help find Charlie.

Phil Klass (William Tenn) by this time had moved with his wife Fruma into an apartment across the street from me in Seagate. Phil was the next person to read the story after Aurea. When he returned the manuscript the next day, he said, "This will be a classic."

I knew he was teasing me, and I laughed.

My next move was to get a different literary agent. I phoned Harry Altshuler, introduced myself and told him of H. L. Gold's request that I write a second story for *Galaxy*. Altshuler asked to read "Flowers for

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Algernon," and I sent it to him. He said he liked it, and would be pleased to be my agent. H. L. Gold should, of course, have first crack at it.

Euphoria is a mild word to describe my feelings. I had just finished a story that had been in the back of my mind for years, and I felt good about it. And I had landed a respected agent who liked it and an editor who had asked for it. My troubles, I thought, were over.

I was mistaken.

Rejection and Acceptance

A few days later, Harry Altshuler called and told me he'd been in touch with H. L. Gold on behalf of another of his writers, and had mentioned my new story. "Horace wants you to bring it to his office-apartment. He'll read it right away. Do you know his place?"

"It's where I learned to play poker and discovered I'm not very good at bluffing."

"All right then. Don't discuss price if he wants to buy it. I'll handle that end."

It was a long trip from Coney Island to 14th Street on the east side of Manhattan, and by the time I arrived I was on edge. The story meant a lot to me, and I hoped it could be published in a major science fiction magazine like *Galaxy*. But Horace had a reputation as a hands-on editor who didn't hesitate to ask for changes.

He greeted me at the door, took the envelope and said, "Relax in the study while I read this in my office. Help yourself to coffee and doughnuts."

It had never occurred to me that he would read it while I waited, or that I would get instant feedback from one of the most prestigious editors in the field.

For the next hour or so, I drank coffee, read *The New York Times* and stared into space wondering if he would like it or hate it, buy it or reject it. Finally, he came out of his office, deep in thought, and sat across from me.

"Dan, this is a good story. But I'm going to suggest a few changes that will turn it into a great story."

I don't remember how I responded.

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"The ending is too depressing for our readers," he said. "I want you to change it. Charlie doesn't regress. He doesn't lose his intelligence. Instead, he remains a super-genius, marries Alice Kinnian, and they live happily ever after. That would make it a great story."

I stared at him. How does a beginning writer respond to the editor who bought one story from him, and wants to buy a second? The years of labor over this story passed through my mind. What about my Wedge of Loneliness? My tragic vision of Book Mountain? My challenge to Aristotle's theory of The Classic Fall?

"I'll have to think about it," I mumbled. "I'll need a little time."

"I'd like to buy it for one of the upcoming issues, but I'd need that revision. It shouldn't take you long."

"I'll work on it," I said, knowing there was no way I'd change the ending.

"Good," he said, showing me to the door. "If not, I'm sure you'll write other stories for *Galaxy* in the future."

I called Harry Altshuler from a pay phone and told him what had happened. There was a long pause.

"You know," he said, "Horace is a fine editor, with a strong sense of the market. I agree with him. It shouldn't be too hard to make that change."

I wanted to shout: This story has a piece of my heart in it! But who was I to pit my judgment against professionals? The train ride back to Seagate was long and depressing.

When I told Phil Klass what had happened, he shook his head. "Horace and Harry are wrong. If you dare to change the ending, I'll get a baseball bat and break both your legs."

"Thanks."

He made another suggestion. He was then working for Bob Mills, editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. "Let me take the story up to Mills and see if he'll buy it."

I was torn. Whereas *Galaxy* was considered the most successful science fiction magazine, *F&SF* was most respected for its literary merit. I told Phil to go ahead.

A few days later I got the good news along with the bad. Bob Mills liked the story and wanted to publish it, but he was limited by the

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publisher to a maximum of 15,000 words per story. If I'd agree to cut 10,000 words, he would buy it at two cents a word.

"I'll see," I said.

The decision wasn't too hard. Recalling my own editing days, Bob Erisman's admonition to cut, and Meredith's comment that Lester del Rey would never revise because it would cut his income in half, I shook each page, and crossed out every paragraph and word that wasn't absolutely necessary. It didn't hurt as much as I feared.

I got rid of *that-ery* and *which-ery*, and redundant phrases, and digressions. "*Sentences plodding along with lots of little words just like this one does were revised.*" Changed to read: "*I revised plodding sentences.*" Fifteen words trimmed to four without changing the meaning. At the same time, by altering *were revised* to *I revised* — passive voice to active voice — I changed *pedestrian style* into a lean, muscular prose.

Then I looked at the last scene in which Alice puts down the manuscript and asks Nemur to go with her to find Charlie. I hesitated a moment, and then drew a long diagonal line through that page and a half, allowing the story to end with his words: "*P. P. S. Please if you get a chanse put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard...*"

Bob Mills bought the story.

That summer, I was invited to attend one of the getaway workshops in Milford, Pennsylvania at which the old-guard Hydra Club writers were invited to spend part of each afternoon passing around pages of new stories for critique by their professional peers. I was invited to submit a story for the workshop, and I decided to let them read "Flowers for Algernon."

The night before the workshop, I glanced through the manuscript and realized I'd made a mistake. Since I'd cut off the ending, in which Alice finishes reading the Progress Reports and goes off in search of Charlie, the opening, in which Nemur gives her the manuscript, was now superfluous.

I'd written it that way because I was afraid to let the story open with Charlie's illiterate spelling and simple plodding sentences. I'd been afraid to throw the reader into Charlie's "special" point of view without warning.

I decided I had to trust the reader.

That night, I cut the first two pages and let the story begin with Charlie's words, in Charlie's voice:

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progris riport 1 — martch 5

Dr. Strauss says I shud rite down what I think and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont know why but he says its importint so they will see if they will use me. I hope they use me.

Then I went out to face my critics. Among those I remember forty years later were Judy Merril, Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, Jim Blish, Avram Davidson, Ted Cogswell, Gordie Dickson. I beg those I haven't mentioned to forgive me.

We set out chairs on the front lawn, and then passed the pages around the circle. All I can remember now is the generous warm praise, the congratulations, and the sense that these people I admired had accepted me as a fellow writer.

"Flowers for Algernon" was published as the lead story of the April, 1959 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, with a cover by Ed Emshwiller. Five months later, he gave Aurea the original oil painting as a gift in honor of the birth of our first child, Hillary Ann. The painting still hangs in our living room.

At the 18th World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh, in 1960, as Isaac Asimov handed me the Hugo Award for the Best Story of 1959, he praised it lavishly.

Asimov later wrote in *The Hugo Winners:*

"'How did he do it?' I demanded of the Muses. 'How did he do it?'...'And from the round and gentle face of Daniel Keyes, issued the immortal words: 'Listen, when you find out how I did it, let me know, will you. I want to do it again.'"

I wasn't alone on that celebration night. An unseen someone cast a second shadow in the spotlight beside me. Another hand reached out for the Hugo Award. Out of the corner of my mind, I glimpsed a memory of the boy who had walked up to my desk and said, "Mr. Keyes, I want to be smart."

And he has been with me as Charlie Gordon ever since.

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SPECULATIONS

ATHLETIC SHOES WILL CONTINUE EVOLVING AT A FRENETIC PACE UNTIL THEY ACQUIRE CONCIOUSNESS...

hong

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The author denies those rumors circulating of a showdown he might have had on the California streets of Carmel-by-the-sea with a gunslinger by the name of Eastwood. He does, however, admit to working on the city planning commission and says he has lately been concerned with the discreet placement of portable toilets at construction sites, which he claims is not a far cry from his past work in academia. (Let's hope this claim does not provoke any challenges from former colleagues.)

The Mediated Faculty

By Robin Wilson

ONE APRIL MORNING NOT long ago, in our green old college town of Granger City, California, two alien sophomores violated campus regulations. Attending our university under the one-sided intergalactic student exchange program imposed by our Rigelian "visitors," they had been peaceful enough, busy with the mediated courses we supervise (now most of our curriculum), until that morning when they fell out over some trivial question of miscegenation. The two had become involved in an intricate and — we are informed — sometimes painful *roman à quatre* with a native Californian and a hairy quadruped from a small planet in a minor system, one so insignificant as to bear only a catalog number (*Bonn Durchmusterung* +16°, 2257).

Faculty Dictum: *Miscegenation has ended racism on our planet, and we find it incomprehensible that until well into the past century it was illicit in much of what was then the United States. Now we are confident that coitus among our newer students will do the same for intergalactic*

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amity. It also strengthens the genetic feed stock when it produces viable issue.

And so they resolved to settle their differences in one of the dreadful duels — the Rigelian "visitors" romantic amalgam of the chivalric code, German students' dueling *Verbindungen*, and American wild west shoot-outs — that are now such an integral part of the college scene. The sports-loving aliens have become obsessed with their odd version of our cowboy mythos and have enlisted many of our domestic students in their competitions.

Faculty Dictum: *Duels on our campus are proscribed as false replications of historical practices, as are intoxication, plagiarism, the consumption of live fish, and the theft of undergarments belonging to students of any gender.*

The weapons the duelers chose were conventional repeating quarkers; their mounts were the small, quarter-ton ground-effect utility ductors they had stolen, to the ire of our university groundskeepers, from our motor pool. These are the lively little quasi-military vehicles that are the latest in the enduring General Purpose (G.P. or "jeep") series extending back to Earth's next-to-the-last planetary war, fought near the midpoint of the last century.

Faculty Dictum: *Affectionate tales of the "heroic" little vehicle that was readily stolen unless disabled by removal of the distributor rotor are also false historical replications, and are discouraged, as is speculation about the meaning in this context of "distributor rotor."*

The duelists met at dawn on our nearly deserted quadrangle, the whine and swoosh of their machines reverberating among the mirrored carbofil facades of our buildings and echoing down from the misty blue of the Granger City Dome, which is low over our campus. The racket woke our students in their dorms and disturbed our handful of animate faculty and communications technicians in their cells and cloisters. We too were awakened — that is, powered up from standby mode — by

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the noise, sound being one of the few sensory perceptions left to us.

The Rigelian Tau, who had started the quarrel by making rude jests about the multiple and colorful penes of the Rigelian Gamma and the comically lustful noises of his quadruped lover, was the more skillful driver and soon forced his opponent's jeep head-on into one of our fine old Sycamores. These were planted back in the time of the second ozone scare and the beginning of the Great Reforestation Movement in the twenties.

But the Gamma was for the nonce lucky. As he fled on foot, chaps flapping and spurs jingling, his callous pursuer cut a bloody swath through a newly gathered gape of spectators and struck hard upon our low, wrought-iron drinking fountain (gift of the class of '04) hidden among his victims. Our little jeep flipped, tossing the Tau and his quarker in a low trajectory over our fountain and into the white stone lintel of our Language Arts building, where his horned head deposited a gelatinous burst of scarlet and gray, which are, incidentally, our school colors.

The Rigelian Gamma, thus delivered from threat, screamed his native cry of triumph, thrust forth his iridescent bacula in an uncontrollable spasm of joy, and performed his race's traditional victory celebration — seriatim — upon the supine forms of three student cowgirls, the star forward of our men's field hockey team in his regulation snakeskin boots and knee-length jeans, and one crinolined professor of Xenolinguistics, whose pleas for gentleness delivered in the Rigelian's own language inordinately excited him.

A moment later, spent and dazed from his busy early morning, the Rigelian Gamma was lassoed and violently pulled apart by our angry students, faculty, and groundskeepers.

Faculty Dictum: *Summary, on-campus execution of malefactors is Item (b) in Section 4 of the List of Disapproved Campus Celebratory Activities, along with the destruction of goal posts (a), student occupation of administrative offices (c), and ritual defloration (d).*

Now all this would have amounted to very little, just another student hijinks story reported in our carefully monitored campus newspaper, had it not been for an ambitious young student leader named Henry Najeeb. A large, muscular man with much dark facial hair in stylish bobs about an

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aquiline nose and full lips, he was the scion of one of Southern California's powerful Amerarab families whose enormous fortune derived from a chain of up-scale connivance stores and feely-plug rental outlets in Riverside County. Partly because one of the Rigelian Gamma's cowgirl victims had been Najeeb's sometime lover but mostly because he knew a good political cause when he saw one, he roused first our campus and then the town. By nightfall chanting lynch mobs had left no alien alive in Granger City, although their torches occasioned some substantial air-quality problems within our dome.

Despite our best efforts and those of local, continental, and planetary governments, word of the Granger City massacre spread quickly around the globe, converting to violent xenophobia a humanity whose hatred of the aliens had been repressed in the name of interstellar amity reinforced by a prudent planetary cowardice. Within a week, almost all the thousands of alien traders, protoplasm collectors, students, adventurers, and diplomats who had come to Earth (named *psarkit djah*, "our new frontier," in middle high Rigelian) were gone. Many were murdered by angry mobs; most were able to escape via one of the dozen or so spaceports housing the aliens' strange, organic spacecraft.

Faculty Dictum: *Genocide, however merited, is strictly prohibited on campus for nearly all ethnic groups.*

Young Najeeb, widely acclaimed the prophet of a new order, rose to power as swiftly as any media creation in history. He was quickly appointed to leadership in governing councils at the local, state, continental and planetary levels, although we did not make him president of our student body. By the summer of his twenty-fourth year, six weeks after the Granger City duel, Henry Najeeb was the most admired and hence most powerful person on Earth, and it was to him that the dire message from the Supreme Galactic Council was delivered.

Thereupon — clad in full evening Western, from ten-gallon Borsalino to cock-heeled Ferragamos — he finally came to the dais before us to seek our wisdom and counsel.

"Sirs and madams," he said in the formal studentspeak we require of petitioners, his drawl reverberating among the vaulted arches and

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formerets of the great dome that is the ornate Memorial Faculty Club where we hold sway. "Profs, deans, an' docs: Ah, Henry Najeeb, Senior Second Class in the College of the Way Things Go, do petition y'all for aid and counsel. Ah have paid the ten-credit fee and had my student Ah.D. card stamped."

"Speak, Senior Second Class Najeeb!" we thundered with oracular resonance. We use our cave-of-winds voice with petitioners; it is built into our circuitry and tends to obscure the fact that we are one hundred and seven kilograms of silicon and rare earth oxides (mostly field-effect opto with some hydronics at the front end) and a few more than twelve hundred sealed and wired Erlenmeyer flasks containing our soft dark selves twitching in deliciously comfortable amber fluid.

"Ah have got mah ass in a crack," said Najeeb in his meticulously archaic student lingo, "and maybe yours and ever'body else's too."

We have an *Aha!* circuit useful in both studentspeak and facultyspeak. "Aha!" we said. "While we tolerate youthful hijinks on our campus, some things can be carried too far. What have you been up to, Mr. Najeeb?"

"It's the massacre of them aliens last month. The Galactic Council has written us that they're more'n a little pissed and gittin' kinda tired of our planet anyways, and fer starters, they're gonna go ahead and destroy Granger City."

"When?"

"Thursday next. At 11:30 in the morning."

We have a most impressive administratorspeak *hmmm* circuit little used in studentspeak and facultyspeak. "Hmmm," we said. "This will require thought and, of course, consultation. We will hear our several constituencies, Mr. Najeeb, and let you know our findings through regular campus channels."

"But there's nothin' to decide!" Najeeb cried, darting his eyes around him at the dim and vastly domed mosaic of our faces, scanned from the faculty sections of old yearbooks and restored pixel by patient pixel to faultless eight-by-ten-foot glossies. "Them Galactic sumbitches think they're a bunch a ol' Indian fighters and we're a bunch a ol' Indians, and we gotta do *some*thin'!" Our impressively vaulted chamber echoed his final syllable: *thin — thin — thin.*

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"Through established university channels!" we thundered. "In the meantime you are excused."

Najeeb left, muttering, and we set to work.

The first step for us, of course, was to dis-integrate, which instantly brought the babble of twelve hundred voices, each belonging to a learned individual who considered him- or herself to be an original thinker with a proprietary interest in truth and virtue. These are the qualities that made us proud to be professors and led generations of students in annual popular referenda to select us — sometimes snatching us from graves dating back almost to the founding of the institution in 1927 — as the university's finest, and thus appropriate candidates for reconstitution into our current selves, the Mediated Faculty. Twitching. In our glorious amber fluid.

There followed the usual spirited flow of debate clustered by academic field. The life scientists proposed a biological weapon that would eliminate all life on the aliens' home planets or at least make their spaceships ill, but the physical scientists could not agree on an appropriate delivery system. The social scientists suggested normative and summative studies of cross-cultural patterns of aggression. They had a title, "The Transmogrification of Exogenic Chi-Factor Determinants in Strife Resolution: A Vertical Exegesis" and sixteen co-authors before pen (speaking, of course, metaphorically) was set to paper. The engineers designed a complex subterranean shelter complete with a state-of-the-art sanitary leach field. And the English Department — as it had on every issue since the invention of the DNA recovery process that reanimated us and, incidentally, made possible the third Reagan administration — voted to secede from the university.

When all departmental proposals had been aired, all opinions expressed in exacting detail — and then repeated — our chair, wise and experienced, struck her gavel (again, metaphorically) and reactivated integration.

Faculty Dictum: *Campus regulations and policies will be formulated strictly by means of democratic processes, and in full consultation with all members of the campus community, whenever time allows.*

* * *

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We called for a top administrator, and when he had been released to our custody, we instructed him to solve the problem. Only a decade older than Student Second Class Najeeb, President Hwang-Ng was stooped and balding after three years in office. Dressed in his customary blue pinstripe jumpsuit, he assumed the dais. A beam of yellow light reserved to honor persons of rank cascaded dramatically down upon him. His pate gleamed.

"Learned friends and colleagues," he began in the polished administratorspeak that had convinced our search committee to recommend him to our Board, "you honor me with your confidence. As always I defer to the wisdom of the faculty, but I have seen the letter from the Supreme Galactic Council and I have informed the Board that Najeeb is right when he says our ass is in a crack, that the Council intends to destroy us all next Thursday, and that this may be just the first step in a more massive, planetary retaliation."

Hwang-Ng paused a moment to allow his final syllable, "*shun — shun — shun,*" to cease its echoing, and then he added: "The Board extends you its best wishes and assures you of its confidence in your governance of the university while they and my administration are on retreat for the next week or so down in Disney County or maybe further south in the Baja Protectorate, we haven't yet decided which would be safer...uh...more conducive to our task — *ask — ask — ask.*"

WE AGAIN DIS-INTEGRATED and this time we listened to individual Erlenmeyers, particularly those from the Libertine Arts. We heard painters and holographers who debated post this and retro that. We listened as a nasal flautist did variations on Von Webber's *Casuistry Cantata,* and — to our eventual profit — we took telling testimony from Professor Mizkitti, the xenolinguist who not only had newly joined our number at the hands of the lynched Rigelian Gamma but also understood the aliens' fascination with our western mythos.

"Spin this," she said. "Gamma killed Tau in a duel, and then he himself died when someone defended my — uh — honor. Maybe we ought to offer our invaders another contest with my champion."

At this we re-integrated, put our heads together — an unavoidable act considering our circuitry — and agreed upon our course of action.

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We called Mr. Najeeb back before us. "Senior Second Class Najeeb," we intoned. "Hear our formal resolution:"

> WHEREAS *the Supreme Galactic Council intends to destroy this university in retaliation for the extra-duel death of a Rigelian student, a probable first step in the ultimate destruction of our planet as our visitors tire of their "New Frontier;" and*
>
> WHEREAS *our visitors have amply demonstrated their regard for the field of honor as the means for conflict resolution; and*
>
> WHEREAS *the victory of a champion chosen by the university to represent it will likely satisfy the Council's demand for honorable redress and return us to the just barely bearable status quo pertaining before the Granger City massacre; and*
>
> WHEREAS, *on the other hand, the defeat of said champion is just as likely to convince the Council of our utter inferiority and render us uninteresting for further exploitation by their traders, protoplasm collectors, students, adventurers, and diplomats; therefore be it*
>
> RESOLVED *that you, Henry Najeeb, Senior etc. and Most Admired Man on Earth, do forthwith go forth with fortitude and with our assurance of our gratitude and procure a suitable gauntlet to throw down before the Galactic Council's champion.*

Mr. Najeeb, suddenly illuminated by our honoring beam of yellow light but wise to his problematic future, turned to leave our dim amber presence, his shoulders hunched in resignation. He did not even then, however, abandon the impeccable studentspeak that had taken him so far and now made him our last, best hope.

"Aw shit," he said.

Our dome echoed, *it — it — it.*

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* * *

Early on Thursday morning, well before Granger City's scheduled destruction, the jeeps — first two and then one — again whined and swooshed across our grassy quadrangle for a few short minutes. By that evening, the last of the aliens' spaceports had been disassembled and packed into their strange, vastly swollen organic spacecraft. They were followed aboard by the remaining "visitors" led by the Council's triumphant champion, a Rigelian Lambda with a new notch added to the many on the quarker holstered against his fringed chaps.

We had a little more silicon and a new Erlenmeyer, its occupant luxuriating in amber contentment, and we were eager to learn how this addition of a vigorous young student voice would improve our deliberations.

We had already learned something new that day, that our ground-effect jeeps cannot be disabled by removing the distributor rotor. They have no distributor rotors. But as our fine groundskeepers demonstrated, they have other parts of equal vulnerability.

Faculty Dictum: *Students distinguishing themselves in extracurricular activities such as competitive sports which bring renown to our campus community can expect swift promotion and early commencement.*

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PLUMAGE FROM PEGASUS

PAUL DI FILIPPO

When You Wish upon a Midlist Star

"Oprah Winfrey may have her reading club, but other celebrities are joining efforts to persuade more Americans to pick up a book. In a campaign designed to make reading cool to young people — and by extension, to sell more books — the actress Whoopi Goldberg and the talk show host Rosie O'Donnell are being featured in ads promoting reading as hip."

— Dana Canedy,
The New York Times, April 20, 1999

MY BOOKS weren't selling well, not well at all. So my publisher called me into his office, handed me a business card, and said, "These people are your last hope. Go see them right now."

Out on the cold street, I consulted the card:

CELEBRIBLURBS
"You hack 'em, we flack 'em!"
Ogilvy Hozzana, President

I reached the address given on the card and was ushered into the office of Hozzana himself. A fat, buoyant fellow with a greasy comb-over, an expensive suit that had certainly originated in Hong Kong but had apparently traveled to these shores on the back of a stowaway in a dirty cargo hold, and an unlit cigar clenched between his tombstone teeth, the genius behind Celebriblurbs kindly bade me sit.

"Your publisher has already called me, kid. You sound like just the kind of client whose career we can turn around. Apparently, you write swell stuff — for them what likes it — but you come off as a little highbrow, and your books don't move out of the stores any faster than a salted slug."

"Well, I suppose — "

Hozzana leaned forward confidentially and poked his cigar at me. "The only thing you're lacking is some star-power behind your bullshit. Endorsement by the rich and famous, that's what moves

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units these days. And that's precisely what we offer. Now, why don't you tell me a little bit about your last book?"

"It's, um, kind of gonzo speculation — "

"Bingo! Right away you've helped me narrow down the list of possible blurbers."

"But I had some notion that I'd be able to select the personality whom I wanted to appear on the jacket."

"No way, kid! All our celebrities have patented consistent images that have to be guarded and nurtured. That's the whole product they're selling. If we let the authors pick and choose, it'd be chaos! What if we had the same star endorsing multiple books with radically different viewpoints? Charlton Heston boosting Jerry Pournelle *and* Lew Shiner! Fugheddiboutit! Or what about the case where the totally wrong guy appears on a book — say, Arnold Schwarzenegger's moniker sprawling across the latest Joyce Carol Oates? The consumer wouldn't know what the hell the celebrity stood for anymore! No, there's a science to this racket, and that's what you're buying from me, my expertise. Each star has a certain profile that we carefully match to the author."

"But I pictured Whoopi or Rosie — "

"Not in this lifetime, pal! Absolutely not! In your field, Whoopi only does Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany and Owl Goingback. Rosie handles Connie Willis and Jonathan Lethem. Now, for your kind of Rudy-Rucker-style craziness — have I pegged you right or not? — we want maybe Johnny Depp or Sean Penn, Sandra Bernhard or Janeane Garofolo. Maybe somebody like Jack Nicholson if we're pitching it to an older audience."

"Wow, Jack Nicholson — "

"Whoa, boy — I didn't promise *Jack*, I said somebody *like* Jack. How's Dennis Hopper sound to you?"

"Dennis Hopper? Is he even mentally stable enough to write a whole sentence?"

Hozzana burst out laughing like merry old King Cole. "You thought the stars would actually read your book and write their own blurbs? Man, it's a miracle you haven't been eaten alive by this business before now! There's no way these A-list people have time for that kind of nonsense. They just lease their names to us. We have an extensive staff here who compose the actual celebriblurbs. They're

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the schmucks who do the actual reading — sometimes, if the deadline isn't too tight."

"Gee, I don't know, Mr. Hozzana, this seems awfully false and unethical — "

"What's unethical about it? The celebrities have entrusted their names to me, and I apply them in a manner that safeguards them and you. Celebrity endorsements have always been like this. You think Lorne Greene ate Alpo?"

"If you're going to make everything up, could I have some input into the blurbs then?"

"Sorry, kid, no way. If you were capable of pitching your own books effectively, you'd be rubbing shoulders with King, Grisham and Crichton by now. Like I told you, this is a science. Hey, don't look so down at the mouth. The most I can let you do is pick out a few generic blurbs that we can use as a starting point. Take a gander at these."

Hozzana passed me a sheet of paper, and I read the first few entries:

"So shocking it made me spit out what I was chewing!"
— Anthony Hopkins

"More different styles here than in my whole back catalog."
— Madonna

"I read it all greedily in one sitting and it really moved me."
— Terry Jones

"This is the kind of space opera that makes *Star Wars* look like *Battlestar Galactica!*"
— Mark Hamill

"Kept my hard-drive spinning!"
— Bill Gates

"I pictured Mira Sorvino as the lead all the time I was reading!"
— Uma Thurman

"I pictured Uma Thurman as the lead all the time I was reading!"
— Mira Sorvino

"Number One on my list of 'Top Ten Reasons to Shut off the TV'!"
— David Letterman

"As chilling as the words 'NYPD! Freeze!'"
— Rudy Giuliani

"A novel that's sexier than Viagra!"
— Bob Dole

I handed the list back to Hozzanna.

"Well, kid, what'll it be?"

"None of these, Mr. Hozzanna.

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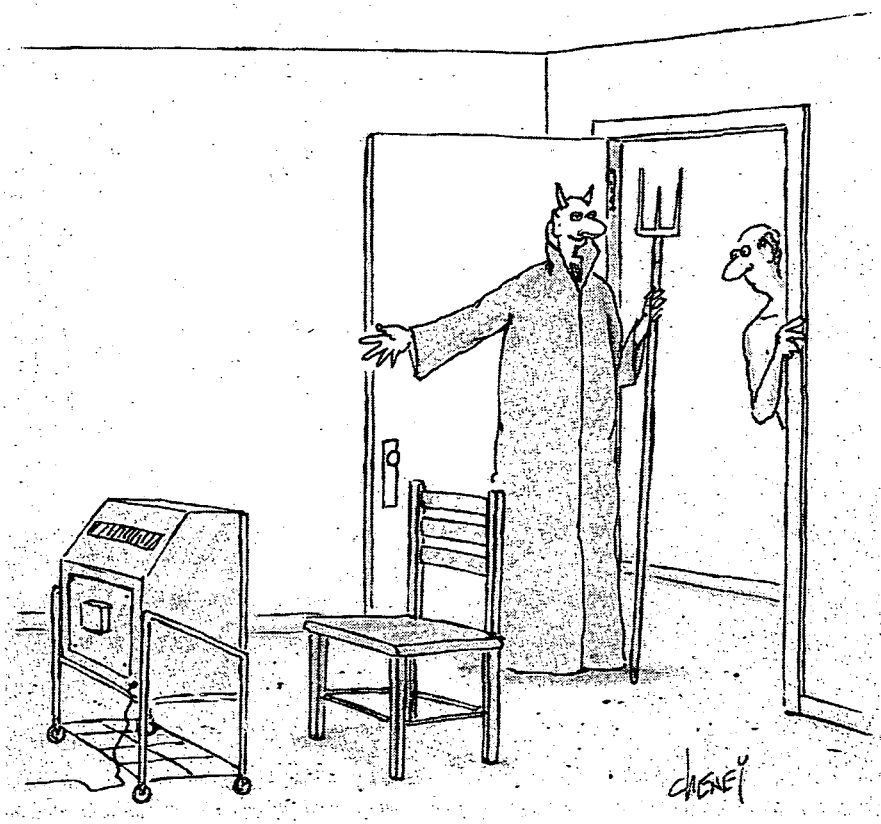
I'm afraid I've changed my mind. In fact, I'm thinking of getting out of fiction writing altogether."

Hozzanna shrugged unconcernedly. "Your call, kid. Mind if I ask what you're gonna do instead?"

"I just got an inspiration for a best-selling book of lists: *Bedside Reading of the Rich and Famous.* I'll compile it from your published blurbs for free under the fair-use laws."

"Slick, kid, slick. Well, when you need a blurb for your new book of blurbs, you know who to come to!"



"Voila!"

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Depending on when this story comes off the presses, Jennifer Vanderbes is or soon will be a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she held a Truman Capote Fellowship. She reports that she was awarded a Wallace Fiction Prize whilst attending Yale University and another story of hers will be published in Best New American Voices 2000 *later this year, but this story marks her professional debut. Ms. Vanderbes certainly seems to have a promising future ahead of her...unlike the narrator of this tantalizing tale of obsessive love.*

Child of Mine

By Jennifer C. Vanderbes

"MEOW," SHE TELLS ME, commands from the couch, her legs tucked under her pink cotton skirt.

I loosen my tie, plead with my eyes.

"Now," she says.

Surrendering, once again, I set my briefcase down, drop to my knees. "Meow," I say, palms planted on the carpet, rolling my tongue into a Spanish purr.

"Here kitty, kitty," she calls. Her thin lips tighten and kiss at the air. She pats the couch with epileptic frenzy. "Come here kitty."

I smile and arch my back. I crawl rapidly, knees burning from friction, then rub my head against her leg.

"Good kitty," she says, stroking my hair with her bony fingers. "Very good kitty." Then she produces a cheese cracker with her other hand and gently slides it into my mouth.

There are things you should know:

I am not a cat.

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I am a forty-year-old man who has, at times, been a respected professional.

I am in love.

This is what happened: My boss, a plump Jackie Gleason type, came into my office one day, peered down at me through his wire-rimmed glasses and said if I didn't get my act together I might lose my job. I work in corporate real-estate. I hadn't made a sale in a while. There was no way to argue it. But then he tried to buddy up, to adopt a locker-room familiarity. Was I maybe experiencing a mid-life crisis, he wanted to know. He spoke of "aging bachelor anxiety," said I displayed all the tell-tale signs. Loneliness. Fatigue. Low self-esteem. Not to worry, he soothed. Even the greatest men — Aristotle, Caesar, Napoleon — surely they went through the same things. (He confessed an affection for history). He assured me I was experiencing a typical-average problem which life would take care of in an over-the-counter way. Get out there, he said. Just get out there and live.

So on my lunch hour, I did what men in jeopardy of losing their jobs do — I went to a bar. And there, in this dimly lit, sticky-floored saloon was a girl in a plaid skirt sitting at the bar, sipping soda through a red straw. Tight brown curls boiled furiously around her face. Her fingertips rested on the oak lip of the bar. At first, I didn't think she noticed me. But when I passed her, she lifted her pale chiseled face toward me and said, "Take me home with you."

I was suddenly thankful for all the movies I had seen, the sit-coms that provided me a certain familiarity with this situation that my life had not supplied. I said, "Sure, baby," and fumbled only slightly before helping her into her red pea-coat and escorting her down the cold street to my car. The drive was short and she was silent. She looked around the car, slid her red pumps over the layer of parking stubs, maps, and wrappers. Out of the corner of my eye I saw her pick up a bubble gum wrapper and slide it into her coat pocket.

When we arrived at my house I instinctively dimmed the lights and lowered the blinds. She unbuttoned her pea coat, dropped it on the floor and stood in front of me.

"Make love to me," she said, eyeing my apartment.

This is where knowledge failed me.

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"But how?" I asked.

"Kiss me. Then hold me. Then take me."

"Now?"

"He who hesitates is lost."

"Ahh," I sighed, pleased to hear a familiar phrase, "but what about looking before you leap?"

"Always look. Even when you're standing still. Even when you're kissing. Now kiss me," she said.

And so I obeyed, pressed my lips against hers with my eyes wide open. And so it began.

Since that afternoon, she has remained in my apartment constantly, refusing to come out even for my short evening walks. It appears she either has no place to go or no other place that she wants to be. I don't ask questions. I am happy she is here, my beautiful baby.

The second day she stayed she asked me to buy her cloth and thread and needles. I did. And within a week she had embroidered a sign that says: "Home is where the heart is." Whenever I offer to take her anywhere, she simply holds this in front of my face.

Shortly after she made the sign, she began demanding Chinese food every night. She would lift her Lo Mein one long noodle at a time, tilt her head back and let it slowly coil into her small mouth. Fried rice was nibbled, grain by grain. She cracked fortune cookies in half as if they were hollow statues hiding treasure.

She also wanted bubble gum and baseball cards. I brought it all to her in stuffed paper bags after work. But I had to ask, "What's it all about?"

"Curiosity," she said, "killed the cat."

"But there is no cat here," I said.

"Well, get me a cat then. I want a kitty."

I cannot say no. She wants a cat and she will make me play cat until I get her one. And of course I will get her one. I cannot deny her anything. There is no time.

Things began turning around at work. I was negotiating an average of seven properties a week, taking calls from the main office. Everyone began telling me I looked younger. "What's different?" they wanted to know.

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"We can tell something has changed."

"I'm in love," I said. "I have found love."

"Well, love will set you free," my secretary chuckled.

"Love," my boss added with a wink, "is a many-splendored thing."

"But what is she like?" they asked. "Tell us about her."

I told them. I told them everything. "It's crazy," I said. "I'm out of control. I can't stop myself."

Half the office shook their heads in confusion and went back to their desks. The other half put their hands on my shoulder and said, "We have been there. My fellow man, we have felt exactly the same thing."

OF COURSE, we are actually getting younger. It was wonderful at first — the energy, vigor, the rediscovered optimism. But it has become a bit unsettling. Because she is much younger, she is actually getting smaller. It doesn't seem to bother her so I don't press the point. She giggles as she stands in front of the mirror each morning and stares at the small berry nipples that remain of her breasts, runs her hands over the flattening curves of her hips.

For now, I am only getting firmer, maybe a little sharper around the jaw. But it's only a matter of time before people start to notice.

She has taken a fancy to wearing my shoes around the house. Her thin legs stick like wooden spoons out of the large, black patent leather bowls that she swirls across the floor.

As she moves through the apartment she says, "I'm going to walk a mile before I criticize you."

But I simply smile and watch her with joy because I know she never really criticizes.

I came home one day and she was standing (now barely reaching my chest) behind the door. "I have something for you, my love."

I was anxious, giddy. "What is it?"

"I have written something for you. Here."

She handed me a marble-covered composition book.

"It's a love letter. A poem. A novel," she said. "All my feelings set to paper."

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I opened to page one. Different-sized words were glued down like a ransom note:

Truth **will meet** danger **in love soon**
On the path to Happiness

And there was more, much more.

"It reads like the purest poetry," I said. "You have a way with words."

"But I must give credit where credit is due," she said, pulling a wad of paper scraps from her pocket. They were remnants of fortunes from cookies and bubble gum wrappers. She had cut the words and phrases from the fortunes and pasted them together in the book.

"Nobody," I said, fingering the stiff pages and fighting back tears, "has ever done this for me before."

She wrapped her arms around my waist and said, "You know I would do anything for you."

I felt a pain in my heart. Time is closing in on us.

I buy her clothes, increasingly smaller clothes. She sends me to the Junior department with a stack of shiny pages she has torn out of fashion magazines. "Like that," she says. "Get me things like that. Every color."

But the clothes get big on her so fast it's difficult to keep up. For a few months, oversized clothing was in fashion and we could slow down on the shopping.

And, because she is getting younger and more insecure, she complains whenever I leave the house now. "Out of sight, out of mind," she cries, grabbing my ankles.

"No," I say. "Distance makes the heart grow fonder."

Then we spend the entire evening sitting on the couch, arguing this point to chicken-egg infinitum, which pleases her in the end because it keeps me at home.

I had to go to work today to close a deal and when I came back she was sitting in front of the television.

"I want sugar, Daddy," she said. "There was a movie about us on television and they said the daddy gave the girl sugar. Why don't you bring me sugar?"

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I ran to the kitchen, fumbled in a few cluttered cabinets and found an open box of sugar cubes. When I returned, her small mouth was stretched open with her tongue sticking out. I set the cube right in the middle and watched it melt, a syrup pool spreading in all directions. Then she closed her mouth and put her arms around me. "Thank you, Daddy."

I am healthier and stronger than I have been in years, but she has gotten so small and vulnerable I cannot leave her alone.

I've made calls about baby-sitters. Old world nannies and high school cheerleaders. More than ever I realize how difficult it is to find good help. I am supposed to go to work, to carry this successful stride as far as it will go, but I will not leave her in the care of just anybody.

"I'll be good," she says. "I promise. I don't need a baby-sitter."

"But there is danger lurking everywhere," I tell her. "Most accidents occur at home."

"Then why don't you stay here with me?"

"Well," I say, "perhaps I will."

Soon, of course, I quit my job and spend my days hovering over her as she crawls around and explores the house. Every corner seems to offer her both memory and fresh discovery. Small objects interest her more than ever. Pennies, paper clips, pencils. I have had to become more attentive with the vacuum.

Three times a day, I offer her silver spoonfuls of mashed apples and sweet potatoes. Warm milk from a bottle.

I stand over her crib at night, watch her peaceful sleep.

"I fear I'm losing you," I tell her. But she can only stretch her pudgy limbs and smile.

She cries all the time now and all I can do is stand and listen. She wants things but I don't know what. If only she could tell me. It's ripping my heart apart.

I refuse to leave her side. I want her to know that I'm there, here, holding her tiny hand through everything, these last moments of strangeness and torment. I stare at her so constantly that it's difficult for me to notice the changes, to see her getting smaller, but I know she is, she is slipping away.

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* * *

I wake up to the sound of moaning, mature, anguished grunts. A woman, sweaty and out of breath, is getting up from the carpet, swollen belly rising first. She glances at me, stress and fear behind her eyes, and rushes out the door.

The crib is empty. She is gone. Why am I still here?

There is no way to explain loss, to capture the feeling of emptiness.

I still have not left the house. I am simply not interested. I am waiting.

At night, I try to squeeze myself into the crib, to smell the sheets where she once lay. I rest my head on the book she gave me.

Though I am no longer sure I am getting younger, I believe that it will happen, that soon the world will take me back as well, to join her, in the infinite, beautiful space of possibility.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

NEXT MONTH WE'RE PROUD to bring you new fiction from two of America's premier writers. One of them takes us on a descent into hell, the other shows us how gods live.

Joyce Carol Oates provides us with the infernal tale (and the inspiration for next month's cover). "In Shock" introduces us to a young woman named Rachael whose life is turned upside-down by a bicycle accident near her home in semi-rural Pennsylvania.

In "The Birthday of the World," Ursula K. Le Guin takes us far away to show us a young woman born into godhood and the difficulties she faces as she comes of age.

Each story is powerful and moving. In the same issue, they serve as a great reminder that in our back yard or on another planet, being human isn't easy, but it does have its rewards

The coming issues will also bring us new stories by Dale Bailey, N. Lee Wood, Amy Sterling Casil, Kit Reed, and Carolyn Ives Gilman, to name but a few. (You see! Santa really did get that letter!) Unfortunately, rising costs have forced us to increase our prices with next month's issue. So if you've been meaning to subscribe, dawdle no more—in addition to saving money, you'll be making sure you get lots of fabulous fantastic fiction.

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SCIENCE

PAUL DOHERTY & PAT MURPHY

GENERAL RELATIVITY AT HOME

In Pat Murphy's latest novel, *There and Back Again*, Bailey Beldon, a reluctant adventurer from the Asteroid Belt, finds himself swept along on an adventurous journey to the center of the galaxy. Accelerating to near light speed, Bailey finds himself far from home in both space and time.

As any well-read science fiction reader knows, Bailey, traveling at close to the speed of light, ages much more slowly than his friends who are puttering about happily in the Asteroid Belt. During the course of his travels, Bailey must deal with the consequences of relativity and its effects on time.

If you read this column regularly, you know that we generally focus our attention on everyday phenomena, science that you can see at work in the world around you. So you may be puzzled at this point. How, you ask, can your readers experience relativity at home? Is this column just an excuse to plug Pat's new book? How can you tie Bailey's predicament to anything that your readers might experience in their everyday lives?

Well, it does provide us with an excuse to mention Pat's novel (currently available from Tor Books), but we really will tie relativity to something that you can use at home. We'll start by talking a little bit about relativity — both special relativity and general relativity — including a discussion of how your speed and your position in a gravity field affect the passage of time. We'll describe how scientists have tested the predictions of relativity, using some ridiculously precise clocks. We'll visit the Andes, where the predictions made by general relativity were instrumental in helping Paul escape a dangerous situation. And finally, we'll come back home and discuss how you personally can use general relativity to your ad-

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vantage, especially if (like Pat) you have no sense of direction whatsoever.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT RELATIVITY?

In many a science fiction novel, characters like Pat's pal Bailey have had to deal with the consequences of special relativity. Special relativity predicts that a clock moving with respect to you will be seen to run slower. If you could watch the hands of a clock in a spaceship speeding past you, you'd see that the faster the clock travels, the slower time passes on the ship; the clock seems to slow toward a stop as the spaceship approaches the speed of light. The clock can never reach the speed of light — the physicists are adamant about that — so it never comes to a complete stop.

If you like, you can calculate the effect of special relativity on moving clocks. (If math makes you crazy, you can skip this paragraph. But this is simple math — just arithmetic, really. So be bold and give it a try.) Calculating how movement affects time is easiest if you express the speed of the clock as a fraction of the speed of light. Let's call that fraction "f." When Pat's character Bailey is traveling at 99.5% the speed of light, f = 0.995. To calculate how much time passes on Bailey's spaceship, you just plug f into an equation. For every hour that passes on a stationary clock, the time that passes on Bailey's clock will be $\sqrt{1-f^2}$ hours. When one hour passes on a stationary clock, one tenth of an hour passes on Bailey's clock.

While traveling at 99.5% light speed, Bailey experiences only a year's time for every ten years that pass back home. Relativity affects all clocks including biological clocks that control aging, so while Bailey's friends age ten years, Bailey only ages one.

Here on the Earth, people travel at a tiny fraction of the speed of light. A jetliner travels at 300 meters per second, just a little slower than the speed of sound. Light travels 300 million meters per second! So the fractional speed of light of an airliner is $f = 10^{-6}$. That's one millionth the speed of light. Clocks onboard the airliner run slower than clocks on the ground, but not by much. When one second passes for a clock on the ground, then a clock on the plane ticks off one second minus half a picosecond. (A picosecond is a trillionth of a second, 10^{-12} seconds.) Scientists say that the plane clock runs slow by about

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one part in 10^{12} or one part in a trillion. You would have to wait 100,000 years for the airplane clock to lose a second! (To do this last calculation, Paul got to use one of his favorite memory tricks: the number of seconds in a year is about pi times 10^7.)

MEET ME AT THE BLACK HOLE

The effects of special relativity have been used in a number of science fiction stories. Science fiction writers haven't used the time-shifting effects of general relativity nearly as often (though Pat is now giving it some serious thought).

General relativity predicts that clocks deep in a gravity field (close to the surface of the Earth, for example, or at the event horizon of a black hole) will run slower than clocks far from the gravitational effects of masses. The rate at which time passes in a given place depends on something physicists define as the gravitational potential.

Now we're going to use a few equations to show you just how physicists use gravitational potential in calculations. You can skip this if you want to, but it's really pretty easy if you go slow. (That's what Pat says anyway. Paul thinks it's safe at any speed.)

If you've ever taken a basic physics class, you've probably heard of the gravitational potential energy. Physicists call it "U." Near the surface of the Earth where the acceleration of gravity (known as "g") is constant, the gravitational potential energy is equal to the object's mass (m) times the acceleration of gravity (g) times the height (h). Written in standard physics shorthand, that's $U = mgh$. (The result is in joules, a unit for measuring energy.)

The gravitational potential (V) is the gravitational potential energy per unit mass, U/m. The gravitational potential is then $V = gh$, (joules per kg). The potential depends on the acceleration of gravity (g) and the height (h). Near the surface of the Earth g = 10 meters/second^2. Using that number, you can calculate the gravitational potential difference between the ground and a point 1 meter higher. It's just $V = 10 \times 1 = 10$ J/kg.

Using V, a physicist can calculate how the distance from the Earth's surface affects the passage of time. When a clock on your mantelpiece measures 1 second, a clock a meter below it will measure 1 second x $(1\text{-}V/c^2)$. (That "c" represents the speed of light.) So the

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lower clock runs slower by

$$(1 - 10/10^{17}) = 1 - 10^{-16}$$

That means it's slow by one part in 10^{16}. If both your clocks were exceedingly accurate, you'd have to wait nearly a billion years before they differed by one second.

That calculation is for a simple case, where the gravitational potential is constant. If you were traveling through space, where the force of gravity changes as you travel, you have to substitute the correct expression for the gravitational potential difference between the clocks at each point in your trip. For example, if you were to approach the event horizon of a black hole, the gravitational potential energy would approach a huge negative value and the clocks on your ship would slow down nearly to a stop.

As clocks (and time) slow down, so do the vibrating electrons that produce the radiation we call light. The rate of an electron's vibration determines the frequency of the light. As the electrons' vibration slows, the frequency of the light shifts from the blue end of the spectrum (high-frequency visible light) to the red end of the spectrum (low-frequency visible light). As time shifts, so does the frequency of the light, shifting from blue toward red. Because of that shift, physicists call this effect the "gravitational red shift."

VERY, VERY, VERY, VERY PRECISE TIME

All the above calculations were worked out by Einstein, after many "thought experiments" back before 1915. Since then, the predictions made by Einstein have been tested with actual experiments involving real clocks. Since scientists can't currently accelerate clocks to near light speed, they did the next best thing. They made clocks so accurate that they can measure the tiny time shifts caused by relativistic effects of slower speeds.

These very, very, very, very precise clocks are called atomic clocks. Rather than relying on the swinging of a pendulum or the vibration of a quartz crystal, an atomic clock bases its time-keeping on the oscillations of electrons between atomic energy levels.

The most common atomic clock uses atoms of cesium. Cesium atomic clocks are so good that they are used to define the second itself—one second is 9,192,631,770 oscillations of one particular microwave spectral line, called a hyperfine transition, emitted by an

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electron in an atom of cesium isotope 133. This very oscillation is the one used in cesium atomic clocks.

Today's cesium clocks easily measure time to within 2 parts in 10^{14}. That's 1 second in 1.4 million years. (For comparison, Paul's quartz crystal wristwatch is good to within one second a day, about 1 part in 10^5.) Cesium clocks can be used for many things, one of which is to test relativity theory.

In 1971, scientists J. C. Hafele and Richard Keating did the most direct test of relativity possible. They flew one set of atomic clocks around the world on a commercial jet airliner and then compared them to a reference set left behind on the ground. The clocks flew strapped to the front bulkhead in coach class. The plane flew around the world to the east taking 41 hours to fly the entire circuit. The experimenters recorded the altitude and speed of the plane, which flew at an altitude of 10 km (30,000 feet) above sea level, and a speed of 800 km/hr (500 mph). The atomic clocks on the plane lost 59 nanoseconds overall. They lost 184 nanoseconds because of their speed of travel relative to the Earth surface clocks, but they also gained 125 nanoseconds due to the gravitational red shift.

To check their results, the scientists then flew the clocks around the world again the other way. Both flights confirmed the predictions of relativity to within the experimental measurement accuracy of 10%.

MEANWHILE, UP IN THE ANDES

So how could the theory of relativity and these clocks that lose just a few billionths of a second per day affect us in our everyday lives? That's where Paul's trip to the Andes comes in. In November 1998, while traveling in the Andes, Paul benefited from Hafele's and Keating's test of relativity.

Paul had set out to climb a mountain, that being the sort of thing he likes to do for fun. (Unlike Pat's hero, Bailey, Paul actively seeks out strange adventures.) The mountain Paul chose to climb was Cerro Guillatiri, on the border between Chile and Bolivia, high up above the Atacama desert. He was climbing with an equally adventurous friend, Bob Ayers.

"In the morning, we parked our rental truck in a deep arroyo and started hiking toward the cloud-shrouded mountain," Paul explains. "There were no trails up

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this remote summit. As we climbed in the thin air above 15,000 feet, the day began to clear. What we saw was beautiful, and terrifying. The mountain was erupting! Steam plumes rose from several vents and rocks tumbled down the summit slopes. We climbed until we got a good view and snapped some photographs, then we decided that this mountain was a little too exciting. We turned around and headed down.

"As we dropped down onto the flat terrain of the desert, every arroyo began to look the same. Bob and I had each carefully noted the way back to the truck, but each of us remembered a different gully as the correct one. If we chose the wrong gully, we could be in big trouble.

"To find the correct gully, I pulled out my global positioning system (GPS) receiver. I had marked a waypoint at the location of the truck as we started our climb. The GPS unit pointed out the correct route back to that point. A few hours later, we were standing at the truck again, guzzling water, eating potato chips, and congratulating ourselves on having cheated death again."

The global positioning system that helped Paul cheat death uses an array of 24 satellites which orbit the Earth every 12 hours. The orbits are arranged so that you can almost always receive radio signals from 4 or more satellites at the same time from every place on Earth.

Each satellite carries a cesium atomic clock. The Walkman-sized device Paul carried received signals from 4 (or more) GPS satellites at once. The signals told the unit where each satellite was located in space and the exact atomic time at which each signal was sent. The receiver used the satellite signals to figure out the exact time at its location to atomic clock accuracy. By knowing the exact time each signal was received and sent, the receiver could tell how long the radio signal took to travel from each satellite. Since the signal traveled at the speed of light, the receiver then knew the distance to each satellite. Since the location of each satellite in orbit was transmitted along with the time signal, the receiver could easily calculate the position of the GPS unit in Paul's hand on the side of Mt. Guillatiri.

All of this however depended on knowing the exact time. Without corrections for relativity the global positioning system would not work!

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The satellites orbit 10 times faster and a thousand times higher than a plane. (To be more specific, they orbit with an orbital radius of 20,000 kilometers at a speed of 10,000 kilometers/hour. That's 6000 miles/hour or 3 kilometers/second.) At these speeds and heights, the relativistic effects are orders of magnitude greater than the effects measured on the round-the-world airliners.

Because the clocks on the satellites are traveling faster than Earth surface clocks, they run slow — as predicted by special relativity. Because they have higher gravitational potential than Earth surface clocks, they also run fast as predicted by general relativity. In this case, the gravitational time shift wins and the satellite clocks run faster than clocks on the Earth. They run fast by 4 parts in 10^{10}. (That's four parts in ten billion.)

When the first GPS satellite was launched, its relativistic correction program was not turned on for twenty days. During that time, its atomic clock provided a great test for relativity, gaining the predicted 4 parts in 10^{10}. The clock gained 38,000 nanoseconds per day. The effect of this error in calculating position was significant, adding an error of 38,000 feet per day. That's over 7 miles per day adding up day after day!

WHAT RELATIVITY MEANS TO ME

The predictions of relativity allowed Paul to pinpoint his pickup truck on the slopes of an exploding mountain. For Pat and Paul and science fiction writers and readers, the consequences of these predictions also points out one of the interesting difficulties about predicting the future.

Back in 1915, Einstein's theory of general relativity seemed to have little practical use. Even today, its primary importance is in astronomy, in examining black holes, gravity waves, and the big bang. But this theory has also proven essential to the development of the GPS system, which allows users to determine latitude, longitude, and altitude to within a few hundred meters and local time within a few ten billionths of a second.

Paul, who owns a GPS receiver, and Pat, who is often lost and plans to acquire one, are both very grateful to Albert Einstein. Paul advises people to learn to use a GPS receiver in conjunction with other navigation skills. (See page 115.) He advises against depending solely on

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a GPS receiver, since you need a backup plan if you drop the GPS down a crevasse (the sort of thing that is quite likely on Paul's expeditions) or the batteries in the receiver die (the sort of thing that is more likely to happen in Pat's household).

A GPS receiver — a navigation tool used by hikers, sailors, pilots, and drivers everyday — depends on atomic clocks and the theory of relativity. Truly it is a way to hold the effects of general relativity in your hands.

Note: For more about Pat Murphy's and Paul Doherty's work, check out their web sites at: www.exo.net/jaxxx and www.exo.net/~pauld.

FINDING YOUR WAY

Since we couldn't figure out a way to have you experiment at near-light speed, we decided to provide a few tips to help you navigate at speeds you are more likely to find yourself traveling. Here are a few tricks Paul uses to minimize how lost he gets while hiking — or when wandering around an unfamiliar city.

1) Always look back.

As you are walking turn around and look at where you came from. It's important to remember what the landmarks look like from this perspective. After all, you might have to retrace your steps. (Although Paul admits that his y chromosome pushes him to make loop trips and never retrace his steps, he often finds that circumstances force him to go back, as they did in the Andes.)

2) Watch the stars.

Keep track of the sun during the day, and the moon and pole star at night. In the northern hemisphere, the sun and moon cross the southern half of the sky. In the southern hemisphere, they cross the northern half of the sky, something people from the northern hemisphere find most disconcerting. Keeping track of the sun can keep you from going in circles.

3) Check your instruments.

If you have a compass, check it occasionally. Paul has an emergency compass attached to the zipper of his storm jacket. He

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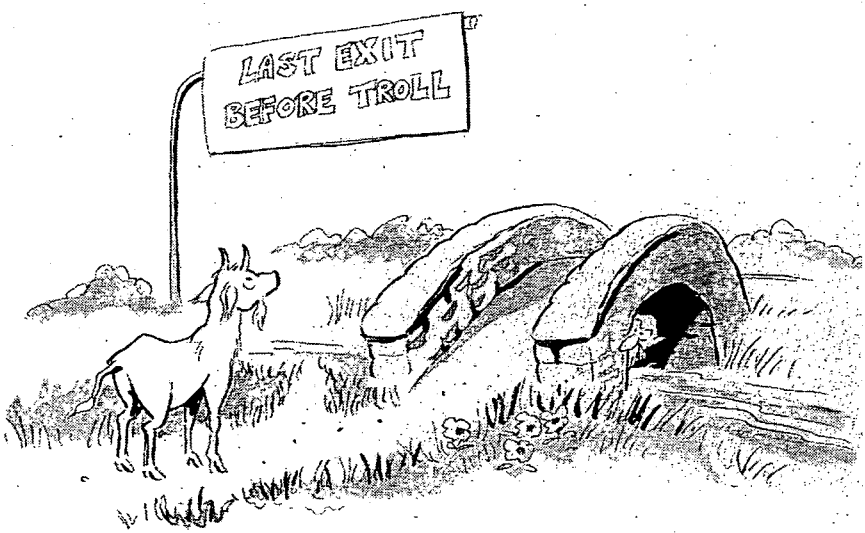
remembers several times when he was lost in a cloud on a mountain top. His instincts told him which way was north, and the compass gave him a different answer. When the second compass in his backpack agreed with the one on his jacket, he accepted their answers and made his way safely down.

SUGGESTED WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

To find out more about atomic clocks, we suggest you search through the US Naval Observatory and the National Institute of Standards and Technology homepages:
http://www.usno.navy.mil/
http://www.nist.gov

To find out about global positioning systems, check out the Trimble tutorial:
http://www.trimble.com/gps/index.htm.



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Where did the time go! Seems like just yesterday we published Rod Garcia's "A Princess of Helium," and yet the records show that story appeared in our September 1998 issue. Time flies...as do many other things in the wild space adventure Mr. Garcia depicts here. Don't worry if you missed that last story—you needn't have read it in order to follow this one. Just dive right in and enjoy.

Bird Herding

By R. Garcia y Robertson

The brain is not an organ of thinking, but an organ of survival like fang and claw. It is made in such a way that we accept as truth that which is merely advantage.

—Albert von Szent-Gyorgyi
Nobel Prize Winner in Physiology 1937

Pawn Opening

NEAR TO NOON, DEFOE'S Moropus gave out beneath him, pitching him face first into hot red sand. He came up spitting grit, staring at the big dead retrobred beast — half-horse, half-rhino, with thick hide and clawed feet. The things looked indestructible. Dumb, mean, and ugly, but immensely durable. Defoe never thought one could be ridden to death.

He struggled to his feet, resisting the temptation to collapse next to his dead mount. Sweat poured out of him, and his still-suit whined in protest. If Ariel's pull were not a relaxed .5 g, he would never have gotten

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up. Bare existence had become a grueling struggle Defoe was bound to lose. He had ridden for hours under a searing noontime sun, long enough to kill his Moropus. This far into Dayside, the red sun Prospero looped around a point just short of the zenith — making it always near to noon. Never dawn or dusk.

Defoe glanced back at his pursuers. Dots on the shimmering red desertscape, two dozen of them, growing larger as he watched. Defoe did not need his macroscope to know what they were. SuperChimps, *Pan troglodyte supreme,* mounted on Moropuses. Just like he had been. Normally you had nothing much to fear from Chimps — except that they might drop your baggage, or overcook the eggs — but nothing was normal on Ariel. Not now anyway.

Unless Defoe did something quick and ingenious, he would end up as dead as his Moropus. As dead as the crew at Subsolar Station. Stripping water and emergency rations off his pack saddle, Defoe strapped his medikit to his arm and started running. Setting his adhesive boots on REPEL, he fairly flew in the light gravity, aiming for a pile of pink boulders rising out of the plain ahead.

A surprising number of life's mishaps could be solved by sheer blind panic, running so fast and so far that the problem got lost, or discouraged. This did not look like one of those times. But win or lose, it never hurt to put distance between you and your troubles.

Glancing over his shoulder, Defoe saw the Chimps gaining. He redoubled his effort — spurred by the horror he had seen at Subsolar Station. Rampaging SuperChimps had beat the crew to death with coolant pipe, torque wrenches, and other odd bits of station equipment. The station crew had not been much to begin with — typical empty-headed Settler types, pushy opinionated Humanists, boastful and intolerant — but they did not deserve to be beaten to death by a bunch of over-evolved chimpanzees. Not much anyway. And Defoe himself had been a total bystander, peaceably delivering a cargo to Subsolar Station. Then, wham, all hell broke loose. Had he not hopped a spare Moropus, he would have been as dead as his hosts.

Despite the light gravity, and the kick of his boots, he felt his body slowing. Lungs labored in the kiln-like air. Thighs ached from hours of riding. Total collapse loomed. He told his medikit to take away the pain,

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pushing his body to its chemically enhanced limit. Defoe did not carry a gun, or any sort of weapon. He was a pilot for Priscilla's sake. A non-combatant, with a rare and valuable skill. Ideally a pilot should be sacrosanct and untouchable. A sort of flying nun. But here-and-now nobody played by the rules. Least of all these monkeys run amok.

Hitting the boulders, he switched his adhesive boots from REPEL to GRIP, running straight up the rocks. Porous stone absorbed the slap of his boots, making the sprawling volcanic rockpile soundless as a cemetery. Bounding from boulder to boulder, he sprinted for the high silent heart of the pile. Overgrown monkeys on Moropuses could never match his speed over broken ground.

But they did not have to. The boulders did not go on forever. This jumble of pinkish lava and rusty cinder block stopped at the plateau edge. There cliffs plunged downward, disappearing into the cloud plain covering Ariel's super-heated surface.

Ninety percent of Ariel remained absolutely uninhabitable, smothered by thick untamed atmosphere. Ruthless terraforming had created a rudimentary biosphere based on high plateaus and mountaintops. Lower elevations were still a seething cauldron of burning winds and greenhouse gases. The Subsolar Plateau was the largest habitable feature on the planet, a huge tidal bulge thrust up into the biosphere. Unfortunately Defoe had come to the end of it.

Headlong flight could not take him much farther. Chest heaving, he flopped down behind an ATV-sized boulder. Taking a hurried drink, he broadcast a mental call for help — his first MAYDAY signal since the Moropus collapsed.

He got no answer. *Medusa* and *Cape Colony* — the high-boost starships that had brought him to Ariel — were on polar orbits, low over the Twilight Belt. Well below the horizon at this longitude. And the transceiver in his head was limited to line-of-sight. His cerebral microchip did not have the watts to bounce a signal off Ariel's high patchy ionosphere; not with Prospero straight overhead. Normally the planetary Comnet would boost his signal to a beanstalk station, putting him in instant touch with anyone in the system. But the Comnet had crashed at the same time the Chimps went crazy — something too convenient to be coincidence.

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Closing his eyes, he scanned the available channels, starting with the closest — his pursuers. The Chimps all wore mini-cam headbands, standard station equipment in case they got lost or strayed. None of them had discarded their headbands, or even bothered turning them off. Just like Chimps, staying conscientiously plugged in while going berserk. Defoe got a choice of two dozen Chimp's-eye views of the chase — which might be an advantage when they got closer. Right now he saw boiling dust, broken by the rear ends of the lead Moropuses, each topped by the back and butt of an angry SuperChimp. Neither helpful nor encouraging.

A few klicks above and behind him, he picked up an open channel, a pair of bird herders, winged shepherds with a tame roc to carry their gear. Defoe punched a call through. No reply. He tried Universal, pidgin Old Speak, even plain English; but these bird herders were not buying. Their communicators might be turned down. More likely neither felt like answering. A lot of locals did not respond to offplanet accents — ignoring calls for help, attempts at conversation, even Settlers standing a couple of centimeters in front of them shouting in their faces. If you don't like having us around — pretend we are not here.

Farther out he contacted a semi-rigid, a moronic robo-freighter plying the edge of the plateau. Defoe tried to con the airship into dropping ballast and rushing to his aid — but the simple-minded control circuitry refused to even boost his signal.

Beyond the airship lay nothing. Just the Great Reach. Thousands of klicks of empty air and burning waste, stretching out over the horizon toward Freeport, Aloha, and other islands of habitation in the Twilight Belt. And orbiting above that Belt was the ship Defoe had come in, the AMC *Medusa* — an armed merchant cruiser stocked with enough anti-matter warheads and orbit-to-surface missiles to depopulate the planet. Tantalizingly out of reach.

He shifted back to the Chimps, finding them frighteningly close. A couple had reined in to inspect his dead Moropus, while the rest dismounted and fanned out to surround the rockpile. Just being Chimps did not make them stupid. Or pushovers. Not for the first time Defoe questioned the wisdom of mixing human and chimpanzee DNA — sympathizing with the Humanists who wanted the biological clock turned back, sterilizing all "bioengineered beings" and post-Atomic

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species. Being clubbed to death by a bunch of brainy monkeys did seem to imply that evolution had taken a wrong turn.

Suddenly, in a burst of static, the Comnet sprang back on. Salvation. Defoe barely believed it. One moment he was lying clinging to a rock — watching death draw closer and moaning over man's fate — a nanosecond later he was plugged back into the cosmos. Finally able to phone home.

Appropriately Defoe recognized a religious channel. Figures they would be first on line. Always pushing the message. Open your heart to the King. Elvis Saves. The entrance logo was a stylized cloud-draped mansion in the sky, with shady oaks and white pine pillars. GRACELAND was welded to the wrought iron gate.

Defoe wafted in. Towering stained glass windows showed scenes from *Wild in the Country*, *Blue Hawaii*, and *Girl Happy*. Music welled up. Right on cue, the King himself strutted down a wide white staircase, a guitar slung on his hip — each step timed to the beat of "Blue Suede Shoes." Spots played over him, backed by deafening applause, as if he were wading into a sports arena filled with 50,000 screaming faithful. At the foot of the stairs he did a one-handed flourish, finishing with a judo chop. Music stopped. Cheering ceased. Elvis struck a pose, a sly mocking smile on his full lips. Dark tousled hair fell onto his broad forehead, "Welcome to Graceland. Let the King be with you."

All this was wasted on Defoe, who wasn't a Believer. Or even a fan. He did not need spiritual comfort from a deified rock star. "Clear the channel. This is a MAYDAY." Defoe bore down on the last word.

Elvis's virtual smile widened. He gave his head a sorry shake, "Don't worry, son. We'll get you out of this. Believe me, the King's seen worse. Lots worse."

"Damn you, clear the channel." Religious messages were supposed to give way to emergency signals — even on Ariel.

But the King refused to fade. "And you won't die either. Not now anyway." His smile turned wry, "Not that dyin's so bad. We all die someday. I did. Though millions would not believe it. But hey, you don't see me cryin'." He hit the guitar, strumming a couple of bars of "Heartbreak Hotel."

"Death's the great adventure," Elvis declared. "And it's done me fine. You just don't look ready for it."

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Defoe could not believe it. Trapped in a virtual sermon, with no sign that his ersatz Elvis meant to clear the channel. "Get lost," he shouted aloud.

"No way." Elvis laughed. "The King ain't leaving you. Not in a fix like this. You got a bunch of bad-ass Chimps breathing down yer neck."

Defoe flashed back to the bad-ass Chimps, who were working their way into the rocks. Time to move. Not wanting to be caught in a 3V trance — communing with the long dead — Defoe cut the signal, took a swig of water, and shifted to his right. Keeping his head down.

Thanks to the mini-cams he could see the Chimps without them seeing him. His best hope was to work his way around them and steal another Moropus. There were two dozen of them — and only one of him — but he could tune in on them whenever he wanted without their knowing it. Clearly the Chimps did not realize he could see through their headcams. (Otherwise they would have turned them off.) Smart? Maybe — but still Chimps.

Damned smart Chimps as it turned out. Instead of looking in every nook and bolt hole, they threw a wide net around three sides of the rockpile, quickly working their way inward. If he had been hiding at the edge of the pile, he might have gotten through a gap between the Chimps. But it would have done him no good. The pair checking out his mount came up to stand guard over the Moropuses. Either Chimp outmassed him more than two to one in a tussle. And both of them were mounted on huge rhino-hided claw-footed monsters. Not the odds he liked.

"Give 'em Hell, boy." Elvis materialized just behind his right shoulder — dressed in a white high-collared jacket over wide bell bottoms with a gold belt sporting a big thunderbird buckle. He wore tinted shades in the noontide glare. "Too bad you don't know karate."

Too bad. The King's hovering presence came from a 3V signal beamed to his auditory cortex and the peripheral area of his left optical lobe. Defoe tried to block it, but megarams of memory backed the channel, boosting the signal, dodging his defenses, tearing through encryption. If Defoe wanted privacy he had to shut down his transceiver, then purge the system bit by bit. He needed his virtual senses far too much for that.

"Did you know I'm a black belt?" Elvis whirled around, coming out of the spin in a black karate *gi*, knees bent, hands flat and casually extended. "Ninth degree." He karate chopped empty air.

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Some help. He'd hit like a holo. No Chimp could even see the King. Their headcams were to let humans look in on them — not to entertain the wearer. Right now they showed the Chimps moving more slowly, back in visual contact with each other. Now they *were* looking in every nook and cranny. They had guessed — correctly — that Defoe would be hiding in the highest part of the pile, where it backed against the plateau edge.

"There's only one way to go," Elvis nodded at a tall pinnacle overlooking the cloud-filled drop behind him. Not a chance, thought Defoe. The mere idea of fighting with that drop at his back made him queasy.

The Chimps gave him no choice. Through the headcams he saw them close in, slowly and methodically. Flankers reached the rim on either side, cutting off his last slim hope of escape. The rest combed forward, searching as they came. Unimaginative but efficient. The plodding end game of competent players sure of their advantage. If he stayed where he was, he would be overwhelmed. Retreating to the pinnacle at least forced them to come at him one two-hundred kilo SuperChimp at a time.

Defoe broke cover, skipping over boulders in his sticky boots. His virtual companion stayed with him. "Nervous, aren't you?"

He did not bother to answer. Nervous? No way. Scared witless was the correct term. Shaking with exhaustion after hours in the saddle. So wobbly on his feet it took powered boots to keep him upright.

"Nervousness is natural," Elvis assured him. "I used to get totally torqued before a performance. So torqued I could hardly talk. I'd be standing in the wings at the Vegas Hilton, heart pounding a mile a minute, shaking like a wet dog. But I always did fine. Know why?"

Leaping from rock to rock, Defoe did not know and cared less. He scrambled out onto the pinnacle, a thin point of stone poking out over the clouds.

"Because I could never do a half-assed show. I had to go out there and be the absolute best. King of Rock and Roll. That's the secret. Give it everything, and you'll do great."

The rockpile ended. Empty space yawned at Defoe's feet. Telling his boots to brake, he tottered to a stop atop the pinnacle, surrounded on three sides by a sheer drop into boiling cloud cover. Kilometers beneath him lay Ariel's incandescent surface. Even in a still-suit the surface heat would

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broil him beyond recognition — assuming he was unlucky enough to survive the fall.

He turned about to check on the Chimps. Three of them picked their way along the rim toward him. Four more emerged from the rocks, followed by a fifth. With his adhesive boots he could head down the cliff face, but to where? The surface was uninhabitable, and the Chimps would rain rocks down until they knocked him off.

Elvis stood next to him, feet set in empty air, still wearing the black karate *gi*. He asked, "Are you ready?"

Defoe shot him a dirty look. Chimps clustered at the knife-edge leading to the pinnacle, pointing and pant-hooting. Several picked up stones, jagged igneous missiles that would zip like cannon shells in one half gravity.

"I mean really ready?" Elvis's eyes were alight. His voice had that easy drawl, part of his cool persona, like his smile. But his eyes were tuned to his body language, piercing and driven.

Ignoring his virtual tormentor, Defoe told his boots to grip, wondering how in the hell he would dodge the rocks. The Chimps might be bigger and stronger, but they were barefoot. If he could just make them come at him, he could pitch them off as they came on one at a time. All two dozen of them. What a hoot.

"'Cause now's the time." Elvis raised his right hand, circling his index finger over his head as though cueing the music. "Here's your honky tonk angel, straight from heaven."

Defoe felt a rush of wings. He looked up. A fresh-faced young woman swept past on silver wings. Long red hair streamed behind her from beneath a jaunty green cap. Defoe recognized one of the bird herders who had ignored his calls for help. She wore a green bolero jacket over a gold and black harlequin flight suit. Her wings were eight-meter power-assisted Falcoform Condors, with black solar strips on the upper surfaces.

And the roc was with her. The huge condor-like bird landed atop the pinnacle alongside him. She was an outsized female, colored slate green, with a twenty-meter wingspan, an enlarged braincase, and a tall aquiline beak. Best of all, her pack saddle was empty. The giant bird bent down, bringing her saddle closer to the ground.

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Elvis grinned with delight. Lowering his finger, he pointed straight at Defoe, "Gotcha!" He disappeared.

Astonished, Defoe stood there, boots stuck to the stone. The young bird herder banked and turned back toward him, shouting, "Climb aboard the bird." She had a criminal ID number tattooed to her left cheek, the sort used by Settlers to mark a convict serving a long sentence. Or slated for lethal injection.

Telling his boots to let go, Defoe scrambled onto the roc's saddle, seizing the head-bar. The roc took off, accompanied by the red-headed honky tonk angel with a felon's tattoo. SuperChimps were left staring up into space, hooting to each other as Defoe dwindled overhead.

Gambit Accepted

SWEATING WITH RELIEF inside his still-suit, Defoe just wished he were aboard something more stable. Rocs began as brainy, over-sized condors, bred on Old Earth to compensate for species lost in the late pre-Atomic extinctions. On light gravity worlds like Beta Hydri IV, they evolved into the huge man-carrying flying mare beneath him. A bioengineered wonder. But Defoe was a pilot — instantly obeyed by space craft, hovercars, and whatnot. He hated clinging to a pack saddle, unable to give commands. Or even ask questions. Winging over the cloud plain — headed who knows where — with nothing but the swaying beat of a living being between him and a long fall.

He tried to quiz the redhead in charge, but she refused to answer, flying silently ahead of him. Her pennant of scarlet hair streamed back from beneath her green visor-cap. Defoe told his augmented memory to conjure up her face.

Instantly she hovered before him in 3V, just as he had first seen her. Grass green eyes full of innocent determination framed a stub nose above wide soft lips. Which made the numbers on her cheek really stand out. Defoe recognized conviction codes for impossibly serious offenses. Murder. Armed terrorism. Sabotage. Willful defacement of property. A short synopsis of the penal code stenciled across her cheek. Ridiculous. A prank. Like a pin through the nose. A convict's tattoo to shock the old folks. Yet she did not seem the type. Grave honesty lurked in her alert gaze. She

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already looked a shade older than she should have. Whatever the answer to her riddle, she was not giving it. She was not even returning his calls.

Telling the image to fade, Defoe closed his eyes. Hours aboard the Moropus had his body screaming for rest. Clipping himself to the pack saddle, he drifted off, letting the roc's swaying beat rock him to sleep.

He dreamed of Graceland. Defoe recognized the lead-in to the religious channel. Once again he wafted through the wrought iron music gate into the cloud-draped mansion. But this time there was no Elvis.

Priscilla Queen of Heaven waited for him on the white stairs. He recognized the flowing brown hair and keen expressive eyes that adorned holos and icons throughout Human Space. How could a pilot not know Saint Priscilla. Her father, Colonel Beaulieu, was the patron saint of Defoe's profession. Her Betrothal, Wedding, and Daughter's Name Day — December 25, May 1, and February 2 — were all interstellar holidays. Besides, this was Graceland. Who else could she be? She did not look enough like Elvis to be Mother Gladys or Lisa-Marie.

Flanking her were two of Elvis's step-brothers — archangels in their own right — bodyguard Dave and preacher Rick. Dave wore a white karate *gi*, and had searching "head hunter" eyes, accustomed to spotting trouble in a crowd of admirers. Rick had longer hair, a wide smile, and wore a preacher's shining "suit-of-lights."

Priscilla smiled, speaking English with the firm confidence of Elvis's destined mate, a woman picked for greatness. "You will go to Shangtu."

"To Shangtu?" It was a greenie port halfway around the plateau.

"Yes, Shangtu." Priscilla had the patience of a goddess. "When you get there, go to the House of Ro Dae Ho."

"The House of who?" It was unfair of them to come at him in his sleep. Defoe replayed the words in his head. In Old Speak it sounded like "House of Rodeo."

"The house of Ro Dae Ho," Preacher Rick repeated, drawing out the syllables. "Folks there call him Uncle Ho."

"How will I get there?" Defoe lay slumped on the back of a strange roc, headed where the bird willed. What gives here? Why Shangtu? Why Ro Dae Ho? Why him for that matter?

Rick chuckled at his confusion, "Don't worry, you'll get there."

"Safely," Priscilla added.

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Good news there. Defoe opened his eyes, blinking in harsh Prospero light. Graceland had vanished. During his chat with Saint Priscilla, the roc had rejoined the bird herder's flock. Defoe found himself surrounded by big banded geese in a staggered V formation, skimming along the edge of the plateau, riding updrafts off the superheated surface.

Ahead of the flock flew a Bat-boy, a meter long semi-human with leathery wings stretched between long-fingered arms and stunted legs. Half-gliding, half-swimming, the undersized grotesque used big whole-body strokes to power himself through the air. Pointed ears, an impish face, and a short tail attached to the interfemoral membrane made him one of those overly engineered beings the Settlers despised.

Twice Defoe spotted wild rocs eyeing the flock from sunward, hoping for a goose dinner. Each time the bird herders turned them back. Farther along, a Wyvyrn rose out of the clouds along the cliff face — a segmented omnivore bigger than a flock of rocs and twice as menacing. More flying megafauna from Beta Hydri IV.

The Wyvyrn paralleled them, making no move to close. Even a hundred meter multi-winged monster armed with hideous fanged mandibles was wary of humans. Or quasi-humans. Genus *Homo* was easily the most dangerous and adaptable lifeform for a thousand light-years in any direction. Able to devastate whole planets when the need arose.

The bird herders brought their flock down on a flat green volcanic mesa dotted by mossy rain pools choked with sedges. Piles of goose droppings marked a familiar feeding ground. Dismounting from the roc, Defoe looked for someplace to sit not slick with goose shit. Finding a fairly clean spot at the cliff edge, he sat and stared down at the cloud forest clinging to the flanks of the mesa. Kilometer-tall trees topped by bright parasitic flowers poked through the mist beneath him. The Wyvyrn circled at a respectful distance.

Shedding her wings, the young woman settled in beside him, saying in English, "Sorry for not answering your calls."

She ran a thumb along the numbers on her cheek, "There's a price on my head." Literally. "In fact, it would do me good if you could keep off the air." She said it plainly and simply, putting her freedom in his hands, asking him to keep communications silence.

Making Defoe feel like an oaf. "Of course. I'm sorry. I should have

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known..." He had a lot to learn about criminal conspiracy — which is what this was fast becoming.

"Thanks." She held out her hand. "The name's Llenor."

"Defoe. Dan Defoe." They shook. Her grip felt firm and real, lingering a shade longer than needed. He thanked her for picking him up.

"Don't mention it." Llenor grinned, still holding his hand. "I really mean that. If anyone asks, you never so much as heard of me."

Defoe nodded. "I owe you that." Under Settler Law he would be aiding and abetting, but like any sensible vacuum hand he steered clear of arguments among Dirtsiders.

Llenor let go of his hand. His palm tingled, thrilled by the contact. "Why did you come for me?" he asked.

Her grin widened. "Someone up there likes you."

Right, leave it to the King. Llenor looked like a Believer, absurdly naive and ready to do right. Too bad. She seemed so sane otherwise. But why all the heavenly interest in him? Defoe could not think of any good deeds he had done of late.

Llenor studied him intently, perhaps wondering what Elvis had gotten her into. "How did you get hung out like that?"

Defoe told his tragic story, such as it was. His trip to Subsolar Station. The Comnet crash. The SuperChimps going berserk. The long chase on Moropus-back...

Llenor showed genuine concern. Cocking her head every so often, to listen to inner voices. Or incoming calls. When he was done, all she said was, "You're a pilot? So am I." She sounded pleased.

"Really?"

"Atmosphere work only," Llenor admitted wistfully. "I've never been outsystem, or even offplanet." And most likely she never would. Beyond the wild fringes of the Subsolar Plateau she was a marked young woman, liable to be arrested or shot on sight. "Did you think I herded birds for a living?"

Digits on her face said she was a saboteur and kidnapper, but Defoe refrained from pointing that out. He switched the subject instead. "Any idea what made those Chimps go crazy?"

She shrugged, "Maybe it's the way Settlers treat them."

"What do you mean?"

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"You know. Sterilizing them. Caging and dissecting them. Gassing them when they get too old or sick to work..."

"Treating them like animals?"

"Exactly."

"But they always put up with it before."

She shot him a quizzical look, "You expect them to tell you ahead of time? Like present a petition? They're Chimps, remember?"

Right. Chimps *were* animals. You were not allowed to mistreat them, not in public anyway. But under Settler Law killing one could not be called murder. If it was your Chimp — and you did it humanely — you would get off without even a fine. "I suppose you treat your Chimps differently."

Llenor gave a don't-make-me-puke grimace. "We don't own each other. That's what separates us from the Bugs." Bugs, aka "Sculptorian Symbiots," were generally held to be the lowest form of intelligent life.

She shook her head. "When Elvis was a boy, back in the pre-Atomic, white people used to buy and sell black people." Llenor said it softly, as if she were ashamed at how ignorant humans could be. "That was before Lisa-Marie married Saint Michael, bringing love between the races."

Let's hear it for Lisa-Marie. And Saint Michael. Defoe stared at her. Llenor had that guileless, Outback idiocy by the bucket, believing in Elvis and Priscilla, and Mother Gladys. She was probably a sucker for fair play, and giving everyone a break. No wonder Settlers wanted her dead. The big surprise was that none of the sentences stenciled on her cheek had been carried out — yet.

"So what's next?" he wondered.

"I'm taking you to Shangtu." She said it as if she did not like their destination. Shangtu was not a settlement, but well within reach of Settler Law. She was putting herself in real peril, just for some offplanet stranger.

"You don't sound happy to be headed there."

Llenor laughed, "Would you be, if you were me?"

"Then why are you doing it?" There were safer ways of seeing he made it home.

"Because that's what the King wants."

Right. What Elvis wants, Elvis gets. Clearly Llenor was not the type to be talked out of doing right. Defoe did not even try. If she meant to risk

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her life for religion, that was her mistake. As soon as he got to Shangtu, he would punch a call through to *Medusa* and arrange a pickup. Llenor would have to look out for herself. Which was too bad, since he hated taking advantage of women, children, and pious innocents.

Feeling a touch guilty, he told her, "Thanks. I owe you a lot." He meant it. Even if Llenor left him sitting alone on this goose-shit mesa he would be deep in her debt.

She looked him over, then shrugged. "No sweat. You seem like the sort worth having around." The way she said it sounded a warning. Llenor was not really so blasé about this. Not as nonchalant as she tried to look. Defoe put it down to nervousness, having to trust her freedom to a total stranger. All on Elvis's say-so.

Another pair of Bat-boys arrived. He could see what upset the Settlers. The stunted misshapen creatures with wings, tails, and furry faces could hardly be mistaken for human. And could never lead "normal" lives. Otherwise they looked happy, greeting each other by cracking jokes in Old Speak. Their thin flexible wing-skin formed the perfect flying organ, and a thumb and two extra fingers on their wing hands let them pick things up and preen each other. Creating them may have been a crime, but they might not see it that way. Hell, they might even enjoy life.

Seemingly discouraged at seeing more semi-humans, the Wyvyrn spiraled back into the cloud forest in a single swirling movement, disappearing like water down a drain.

Llenor turned the goose herd over to the Bat-boys, then nodded toward the roc. "Let's get going." Defoe mounted up and they headed out, letting the green mesa dwindle behind them.

An hour or so in the air, and he spotted a gleaming spark on a converging course. Incoming signals IDed it as the robo-freighter he had tried to relay through. Distance narrowed, and Defoe realized why his earlier relay had been a bust. Instead of a dowdy semi-rigid he saw a quarter-kilometer long fusion powered airship, with twin falcon figure-heads. Tall English lettering on the silver lifting body hull identified the *Princess Lisa-Marie.*

Llenor gave a landing sign, and the hangar doors swung open. The roc flew in and alighted. Defoe leaped down, delighted to have a deck beneath his boots. Feeling almost home. Llenor landed behind him.

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Drawn up on the hangar deck was the weirdest excuse for a crew he had ever seen. Half-filling the hangar was the Wyvyrn he had met earlier — or one just like it — curled up with its wings folded back along its body, its head segment raised to face the hangar door. Something about a Wyvyrn's big, fanged mandibles made them always seem to be smiling, like a Chinese dragon silently laughing at a zen joke. A naked Neanderthal bossed a gang of SuperChimps in rigger's harnesses, leading the roc to a perch, seeing it was fed. Overseeing the whole show was a small blonde woman with an angelic smile, wearing a powder-blue uniform and a big machine pistol strapped to her hip. A Valkyrie so beautiful she made Llenor look like a boy.

Defoe shook his head in wonder. Welcome aboard the *Princess Lisa-Marie*. It looked to be one wild flight.

Llenor did the introductions. The Wyvyrn was the ship's flight officer. The closest thing it had to a name was a single unpronounceable syllable — "Qiip." No one bothered to name the Chimps, since they did not belong to anyone, and never had trouble telling each other apart. But the Thal bossing them was the ship's bosun, "Wha-tsoph-ki."

"And this is Amanda." Llenor indicated the dazzling blonde Valkyrie with the machine pistol. "She's chief of onboard security, and can show you to a cabin. Get some rest," Llenor advised. "I'll be on the forebridge, at least through the noon watch." Clearly she had a captain's itch to get back to piloting.

Defoe found it fairly painless to be in Amanda's care — like having a Feelie star show him to his cabin. Flat black slidewalks swept them down art deco corridors shining like chrome mirrors. Amanda apologized for the lack of amenities. "There's no steward. *Princess Lisa-Marie*'s a working ship, not a five-star liner. So don't ask the Chimps for service — they won't know what you are talking about."

"My last berth was on a warship," Defoe admitted. The *Medusa* did not have steward service either.

Amanda nodded, "Should be right at home."

Once he was alone in his cabin, Defoe struggled out of his still-suit and sweat-soaked body stocking. Stuffing the body stocking into the laundry slot, he got back a pair of ship's coveralls. Flopping down on the futon, he told the galley to fix dinner. Ariel did not have normal days or

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nights — but since it was the morning watch, he got served a heaping breakfast; soy and eggs, with yeast strips, high-fiber toast, honey grits and pancakes smothered in fruit puree. Defoe topped it off with a relaxing shower and a sound sleep. Whatever came next, it would be far better to face it fed, clean, and rested. This time he got no call to Graceland.

"Good morning." Someone giggled, in stereo. "No, silly, it's good afternoon."

Opening his eyes, Defoe instantly thought he was hallucinating. Or at least seeing double. Standing in the open hatchway to his cabin was a broad shouldered, buxom young woman with two bottle-blonde heads.

"Hi," said the left head. "My name is Norma."

"And I'm Jean," added the other.

"But you can call us Marilyn." They said the last bit in unison, obviously a practiced line.

He sat up on his futon, trying to put the two smiling heads together with the body — which had only the usual number of arms, legs, etc. They-she had on tight blue pants and a shapeless black top a size or so too small. "My name's Defoe." That much he was sure of.

They laughed together. "We know."

"We heard there was a man aboard..."

"...and had to come see."

"It's an honor."

"Exciting."

Norma seemed to speak first. With Jean adding something, or finishing the sentence. Glad he never trusted cabin locks, Defoe swung his feet off the futon, and started pulling on his boots. He was already wearing the ship's coveralls. Checking his internal chronometer, he found it was nearly thirteen o'clock, well into the noon watch. "There are no men on the ship?"

"Not really."

"Unless you count Thals."

"Or Chimps."

"Or Lucifer."

"Come, we'll show you."

He stood up, already feeling on stage. Marilyn led Defoe to the keel

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slidewalk, happy to have him in tow. Charmingly barefoot, Norma and Jean timed everything perfectly, walking, talking, and swinging their hips together. No mean feat, since each head controlled a different side of their body. Norma gave brisk orders to hatches and slidewalks, while Jean flirted with him over her shoulder.

The forebridge was a Humanist nightmare. Everyone was human, more or less — no SuperChimps or retrobred Neanderthals. But nearly everyone was cloned in some whimsical fashion. Llenor had an identical younger sister with her, named Evie. Both turned out to be clones of their maternal grandmother. And she also had twin cousins, Lilith and Lucifer — female and male copies of their mother. Norma and Jean fit right in, making Defoe feel more than ever the odd man out.

But *Princess Lisa-Marie* was still a ship. Lilith and Lucifer were watch officers. Marilyn turned out to be training as a comtech. Little sister Evie was the cabin girl. And Llenor was a hands-on Captain, liking to stand on the forebridge with her family around her, seeing the air ahead, telling *Lisa-Marie* what to do.

Not being the type to fly from his cabin, Defoe liked watching her work. Hitting a sharp temperature inversion, she lost her superheat and had to tilt her turbofans for the vertical thrust to ride over it. Seeing her at the helm reminded him of how long it had been since he'd conned his own ship. Plying a shuttle from surface to orbit was not near the same thing.

"Did you sleep?" she asked.

"Famously."

He tilted his head toward Marilyn, having a four-way talk with the Twins. "Until..."

Llenor laughed, "Marilyn can be a shock first thing in the afternoon. But she's super on long watches. Won't let anyone sleep. Two heads, two hearts, and one body keeps you on your toes."

And a double set of hormones. "She got me out of bed," Defoe admitted. "Where did she come from?"

"She escaped from a Freeport brothel. *Lisa-Marie* tends to collect misfits."

Like me, Defoe thought. Clearly Llenor was always doing Elvis's work. How could she not? He asked what she was carrying, besides misfits.

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"Offworld robotics, and smuggled pharmaceuticals. Too hot and pricy for Shangtu. We'll have to move them further along the plateau." She stayed justifiably vague about future plans. What Defoe did not know could not incriminate him.

Flying over rolling cloud plain, they talked the watch away. Intensely curious about the greater cosmos, Llenor loved his offworld stories. He could feel her eager sense of wonder, confined by the need to live in hiding on her birth-planet. And it was plain she liked him, hanging on his stories, laughing at his jokes, inviting him to be less of a stranger.

From time to time she would stop to tune in on telemetry, or inner voices. Defoe watched her out of the corner of his eye, "taking care of business." Suddenly turning serious. Seeing to her ship. Making command decisions. Receiving scrambled 3V messages, but never sending.

Far from feeling slighted, Defoe liked that serious side of her. He too was a pilot, trained to set things aside — even important things — to see a job done right. When the watch was over, she treated him to a ship's tour that took up both dog watches. By the time they were done, Defoe felt like "captain's pet." A cushy billet for someone whose life depended on Llenor's good intentions.

Only later, lying in his cabin, did Defoe have second thoughts. What he was getting into with this earnest young Believer? He liked Llenor. Who wouldn't? She was honest and generous. Intensely fair, and not too demanding. But what future could there be between an itinerant space pilot and an outlawed clone caught in some doomed struggle with the planetary authorities? Not much. Best he ignore any budding feelings and just get to Shangtu.

His misgivings were soon confirmed. At the end of the next morning watch Amanda appeared at his door. She had not said a word to Defoe since showing him to his cabin. Not surprising. Scuttlebutt had it that the silent blonde security officer was "same sex oriented." Clearly Defoe did not interest Amanda, so long as he behaved himself.

Which he apparently was not doing. The security officer sat him down on his futon, saying, "I have something to tell you."

"What's that?" Defoe could not help liking Amanda — and not just because she was knock-dead gorgeous. They had two big things in common. They both preferred women — always a good starting point. And

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Amanda was the only other unreconstructed human aboard. Everybody else was some sort of bioconstruct. A clone. A Chimp. A Thal, or worse. That she was a gun-toting lesbian did not seem a serious difference hundreds of light-years from home.

"Don't do anything to hurt her."

"Hurt who?" Defoe was being ridiculously inoffensive, trying hard to stay on everyone's good side, especially the Captain's.

"Llenor. She likes you. Heaven knows why."

"Okay. I'll try." Defoe did not mean to hurt anyone, least of all Llenor.

"You better do more than try." Amanda said it with a smile, sitting on his futon, her pistol safely holstered — but her warning came through in the clear. Scuttlebutt also had it that the security officer was an ex-merc on permanent AWOL, who had killed more men than a slew of bad landings, and was charged with numerous serious offenses. A ship run by women barely needed an intercom — Marilyn alone could be a font of information.

Defoe ventured that Llenor seemed well able to care of herself, being smart and competent with a quarter-kilometer of airship at her command.

Amanda shook her head, "Looks are deceiving."

"Really?"

"Take those tattoos on her face. They don't mean shit."

Defoe said they seemed fairly serious.

"Right." Amanda sniffed. "You've seen her. Talked to her. Do you think she's a killer? A terrorist?"

"No." Defoe had never seen a less likely suspect.

"She's innocent as they come."

Defoe had seen enough Settler Law to believe that they routinely got the wrong person. "Is that why the sentences weren't carried out?"

"They weren't carried out because I went to a deal of trouble to spring her from the Port Myrine brig. Understand?"

"Sort of." Defoe began wondering if he had landed in the midst of some "thing" between the *Lisa-Marie*'s Captain and security officer.

Amanda coolly read his thoughts. "I'm not in love with her. Not the way you are thinking. Llenor is special. Sure, she's the Captain. But we all

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look out for her. I do. The Twins do. Everyone does, right down to Evie and the Chimps. Why do you think Marilyn came to check you out that first day? You're not that pretty."

And he thought he had been such a hit, turning two heads at once. "I guess I understand."

"Do you really? I doubt it. Llenor was framed for a bombing at the Helium Works Bugville below Port Myrine. Xenophobes killed a couple of Hive Queens, a whole bunch of Bugs, and a woman pulling security. Does that sound like her?"

Defoe shook his head. Xenophobes were Humanist fanatics, hating anything more than two shades different. Llenor hardly fit the description, being a bioconstruct herself. One who surrounded herself with outcasts and treated Chimps like they had rights. But common sense arguments were rigorously excluded under Settler Law.

Amanda's look turned colder. "The woman she supposedly killed was my lover, Kia. Do you think I'd turn outlaw for Llenor, setting her free and watching over her, if there were the slightest doubt of her innocence?"

Defoe nodded. Amanda acted dead serious about the law — more so than most security officers — and not ashamed to take it into her own hands. "I see your point."

"It gets worse. The last guy she fell for was the jerk who set her up."

"That's terrible." Defoe really meant it.

"Especially for him. He got fried."

"Oh."

"Don't make me kill you too," Amanda advised.

Defoe swore he would do his best. Suddenly he was godawful anxious to get to Shangtu. And not because Amanda might be forced to fry him. Llenor was the one who worried him. Hearing her story had him caring for her — more than was healthy. Unless something soon separated them, things could swiftly get out of hand.

But by the noon watch they were back together, this time on the upper deck, watching the plateau edge slide by to starboard. Clouds piled up by prevailing winds filled the gullies in the cliff face. Sitting alongside Llenor, with nothing to do but enjoy the cloudscape, was like visiting some neighboring dimension. A parallel world containing just the two of them. Without worries or cares. A world not at all like Ariel, but having many

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of the same elements — the plateau, the cloud plain, the *Lisa-Marie*, and the two of them. A world with no past, and definitely no future.

Llenor looked at him. Her long red hair danced in the slipstream, strands flying in front of her freckled face. "What's got you worried?"

Defoe nodded. "I'm not sure I should be doing this."

She smiled, "It's a free planet." Llenor sounded fully aware of the irony. Ariel was free only by default, a raw chaotic wilderness, marginally terraformed, mostly lawless, and utterly untamed. But Defoe heard a hint of challenge in her voice. She believed her home planet was free, for those willing to make it so. He knew now why she never talked about home — or the numbers on her cheek — sensing her deep hurt and homesickness. Sister Evie had told them they had kin on Atoll in the Twilight Belt. No father of course. But a mother, plus aunts and cousins they could never be with — not even for virtual visits. The best scrambled signals could still be traced.

That did not stop Llenor from asking about *his* past. She craved personal information — as if compiling a file for after he was gone. Where had he been? Where was he born?

"On Old Earth," he told her. A long, long time ago.

"Like Elvis?"

Defoe laughed, "Just like Elvis."

Llenor laughed too. An obvious absurdity. No one could be just like Elvis. She took her religion seriously — but laughing was allowed. A big part of the Elvis gospel was, "Ya gotta have fun." An electronic religion based on romantic unreality and hedonistic intimacy.

She reached out. "I've never touched anyone from Old Earth before." Their hands touched, just fingers at first, then palm to palm. Then their fingers interlaced. They went on talking, neither letting go. Neither acknowledging that they were holding hands.

Llenor had no intention of bringing the *Princess Lisa-Marie* any closer to Shangtu. Too much traffic went in and out of the port, making it impossible to maintain their robo-freighter disguise. Instead she planned a low-profile approach on roc-back from the plateau side.

Defoe wanted it even more low-profile. "Just drop me on the plateau edge. Once you are clear I can call for help." Hell, he could always walk to Shangtu.

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Llenor stubbornly shook her head. Priscilla Queen of Heaven wanted Defoe delivered to Ro Dae Ho. Llenor meant to see it done. Dropping him on the edge of the desert was not nearly good enough. Defoe could hardly believe that a couple of days ago he did not much care what happened to Llenor once he was safe. Now he cared too much.

They left the *Princess Lisa-Marie* on Wyvyrn-back. Qiip the flight officer took them as far as the plateau edge, with the roc following. There they had a quick final conference. Defoe tried to convince Llenor to go back with Qiip. "The roc can take me into Shangtu."

"Right. Have you ever soloed on a roc?"

Defoe admitted he had not.

"And how would I get my bird back?"

He gave in and got aboard. Llenor donned her wings and they took off, soaring over the rolling dunes. Kilometers of red-blonde sand slid silently beneath the roc's wing tips. Then suddenly, the desert dipped down and disappeared, turning into green terraced rice fields. Clouds boiled out of a central canyon choked with tall trees. Shangtu itself floated above the canyon, a bit of heaven anchored by colossal steel cables. Shaped like a huge squat pagoda, the port sat atop a giant aerostat, a relic from days when only Ariel's uppermost atmosphere was habitable. Skycycles, fliers, and ultralights darted in and out of landing pads spaced around the flattened pagoda.

Ro Dae Ho had a private landing pad, surrounded by hanging gardens and tinkling bells. Ho himself was there to greet them, the first hint that their coming was hardly a surprise. He was a wispy oriental wearing dragon pants and a black happi coat, with a shaved head, pale olive skin and a long white beard. A young green-skinned hermaphrodite hung on his arm.

"Greetings, greetings." He bowed to both of them. "Please enter my poor house." Chimp gardeners took charge of the roc. Defoe and Llenor followed their host through a carved gate, around a dark lacquered spirit screen, past two Bug Warrior bodyguards hired from a local hive. Light from paper lanterns gleamed on their recoilless cannons and dark armored carapaces.

Ro Dae Ho's poor house turned out to be a light-weight mansion with rice paper walls supported by slender columns. Flowers bloomed in

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unexpected spots — scarlet peonies and blue-white forget-me-nots. The place was set for a feast, another sign Ro Dae Ho knew they were coming. Uncle Ho, as he asked to be called, raised a glass of rice wine in honor of his guests. "Eat, drink, and enjoy. Never talk on an empty stomach."

Defoe looked to Llenor. She should already be gone. Every second in Shangtu compounded her risk. But she smiled, as if to say, "What's the harm in one last supper?"

Enthusiastic green-skinned serving girls in skimpy sarongs showed them to the seats of honor. Laughing and giggling, they tucked Defoe's knees beneath the table, their smooth leaf-green skin smelling of musk. Shangtu's population hosted a symbiotic green algae in their skin and germ plasm. Under the perpetual daylight of the Subsolar Plateau the algae pumped glucose directly into their bloodstreams, promoting shaved heads and nudity — saving on servant upkeep.

Food arrived, first a long series of delightful soups and hors d'oeuvres — which easily satisfied Defoe. Just when he thought they might be done, the meal itself appeared, dish after dish in big covered pots. He looked uneasily over at Llenor. This was taking way too long, but it seemed useless to protest. More rice wine went around. The teenage hermaphrodite settled into Uncle Ho's lap. Defoe's two pretty servers made a game of slipping food onto his plate. He felt like he was on a double date, where "No" meant "Yes" and food had taken the place of sex. When he managed to fend them off, Uncle Ho himself would lean around the hermaphrodite and dip his chopsticks into a pot, offering Defoe "something really special." The two towering Bug Warriors watched over the meal like a pair of high-tech samurai.

Sweets came, and the pots were cleared away. Freed from his servers, Defoe took a moment to uncramp his legs, walking about a bit with Llenor. "This looks to be about over."

She laughed. "That's not how they do things in Shangtu. Sweets mean the middle of the meal." She squeezed his hand; "A couple more dishes and I'll be gone."

Defoe sat down. Another course arrived. As he raised chopsticks to his lips a scrambled call came in. ("Sit tight and keep your head down. We're coming in.")

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He jumped up, spilling his chopsticks, shouting to Llenor, "Get the hell out of here." She was already on her feet.

Uncle Ho must have heard the call too. Shoving the hermaphrodite off his lap, he politely advised the servants to take cover, then hustled Defoe and Llenor past the spirit screen onto his private landing pad. Bug Warriors thudded behind them, venom spines erect.

Chimps had the roc ready. Llenor struggled into her wings. Uncle Ho handed her a plastic stinger, saying, "As soon as you clear the city, dive for the cloud forest." Nodding grimly, she pocketed the stinger, then turned to Defoe.

Her grim look dissolved. No need to worry about when they would part, that had been taken from her hands. For the first and likely last time he kissed her. Even in the midst of that mad moment, the kiss blanked out everything else. Fear and alarm vanished. The fresh newness of her mouth surprised him, framed by her upturned face and windblown hair.

Dark shapes were coming down. Out the corner of his eye, he saw mini-profile parasails dropping toward them, the same type used by *Medusa*'s marine contingent. Breaking contact, he begged her to run. Without saying good-bye, she scrambled aboard the waiting bird. The roc took off, flapping for altitude.

Gunfire rattled overhead. Bug Warriors flung back covering fire. Suddenly remembering he was a non-combatant, Defoe threw himself onto the deck. Shooting got louder, and closer, ricocheting around him. One Bug took a direct hit. A cannon shell in the thorax sent it spinning off the edge of the pad, still firing madly.

Defoe looked up. Uncle Ho lay half a meter away, eyes clamped shut, hugging the landing pad. Horrified, Defoe searched the sky for Llenor. He spotted her roc, tumbling toward the lower levels of the Shangtu pagoda, her pack saddle empty. Then he saw Llenor in a stoop, wings swept back, with a couple of power-assisted parasails spiraling after her.

He leaped to his feet, opening his mouth to shout something useless. His legs promptly buckled under him. Anesthetic gas. Defoe recognized the symptoms of the non-lethal incapacitant. The landing pad reeled and tilted, then slammed into him. Hard.

* * *

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"If you are looking for trouble, you've come to the right place."
—Elvis, Christmas Special 1968

Poisoned Pawn

DEFOE AWOKE on his back, staring up at a hairy, high-browed face with little furry ears. Huge white fangs curved down from beneath big cat's eyes. He blinked and tried to rise, saying, "Boy! Am I glad to see you."

"Same to you," the being above him replied. He was a SuperCat. *Homo smilodon.* With burly shoulders, tawny fur, human limbs and torso, biped stance and a short bobbed tail. He wore body armor and carried a recoilless assault rifle. Fixed to his nose was a filtration mask. Called Rowlf, he commanded the *Medusa*'s marines.

Holding out a humanoid hand, the SuperCat helped him to his feet. Defoe found he had a medikit strapped to his arm, neutralizing the anesthetic. Bug warrior parts were scattered about the landing pad. Ro Dae Ho lay sleeping peacefully — not knowing how lucky he was. Defoe's internal chronometer told him forty-one minutes had passed. Needless to say a lot had happened. Way too much from what he could see.

He broadcasted a frantic call to Llenor.

No answer.

Defoe prayed to Saint Priscilla that did not mean she was dead — the most logical explanation. He remembered how the Queen of Heaven stood on the great white steps at Graceland, promising to see him safely to Shangtu. But Priscilla said nothing about Llenor. How hideously unfair. Llenor was the Believer. The one Elvis ought to be looking out for. If there was an Elvis. There is nothing like gunfire to make you get religion.

Rowlf hustled him past the spirit screen into Ro Dae Ho's poor house, which now more closely fit its description. Paper walls were shredded. Pots and dishes lay overturned. Rice squished underfoot. Uncle Ho's young hermaphrodite was sprawled dead on the floor, alongside a green-skinned serving girl. Both had been shot through the head at close range. Beside the girl lay a shattered vase and a spray of blue-white forget-me-nots.

Two SuperCats were holding down an angry young man with a crew-

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cut, wearing body armor and a gray Militia uniform. That was something utterly unexpected. Defoe wondered where the Settler had come from, and why two SuperCats were practically sitting on him. "What happened here?"

Rowlf nodded his fanged head at the angry Settler. "He saw that greenie with tits and a prick and went berserk. He shot him-her, then shot the girl before we could disarm him."

Defoe stared stupidly at the carnage, so used to hearing Old Speak that the SuperCat's Universal barely made sense. Seeing him standing there, the young Settler shouted, "Tell these mutant bastards to let me go."

Shaking off his surprise, Defoe knelt next to the Settler, putting his hand on the man's shoulder. This time he remembered to use Universal. "I've got a suggestion for you. *Homo sapien* to *Homo sapien*." The young Settler glared up at him. If they really did share DNA, it would be a distinct disappointment.

"Do what these Cats say," Defoe advised, "and don't call them names. Otherwise they are going to give up, and just blow out your brains."

The Militia man squirmed in the SuperCat's grip. "Make them give me my gun back."

Defoe shrugged, "They aren't likely to listen to me."

The Settler cursed and called him a traitor. Defoe guessed he had been added to the man's must-kill list.

"Get him up," Rowlf ordered. "We've got to go. There's a hovership waiting to take us to a landing zone at the edge of the desert." SuperCats dragged the struggling Settler to his feet and they headed down a ramp toward Ro Dae Ho's front door. Waiting at the bottom of the ramp were four more SuperCats, with assault rifles trained at the doorway. Firing erupted from the corridor beyond.

"We're going out," Rowlf told him. "Take this, there might be trouble."

Defoe wanted to say things had gone way beyond trouble, but he stopped, shocked by what the SuperCat had handed him. It was a plastic stinger, just like Ro Dae Ho had given Llenor. Not at all regulation issue for the *Medusa*'s marines. He stared at the weapon. "Where did you get this?"

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"Off a female." Rowlf peeked through the doorway into the corridor, sizing up the situation. Two dead SuperChimps lay face down in the hall.

"What sort of female?" Defoe demanded.

The SuperCat glanced back at him. "Your sort."

Defoe hoped to heaven Rowlf did not mean off her body. "Is she okay? Where can I see her?"

"She's alive — if that's what you mean. And headed for the hovership and the LZ. You'll see her when we get there."

Defoe said a swift thank you to Saint Priscilla, or Elvis, or whoever looked over Llenor. She was alive. And he would be seeing her, or so the SuperCat said. Almost too much to be believed. Especially since she still did not answer his calls.

Stepping over the two dead SuperChimps, they headed out into the halls of Shangtu pagoda. As they worked their way down the ramps to the lower levels, Defoe saw more dead Chimps. Mostly shot from behind, as though they had been running. He also saw more Militia in body armor waving big recoilless assault rifles — not at all pleased to see SuperCats with one of their own in custody.

Defoe did not like the Settlers' hard looks, or the shells that kept flying through Shangtu's paper walls. "What is all the shooting for?" Aside from the occasional fragmented Bug Warrior, he saw no sign of resistance.

"The Militia's been shooting SuperChimps."

"What in hell for?"

Rowlf kept staring straight ahead, over the sights of his recoilless rifle. "They are worked up about what happened at Subsolar Station."

"Shangtu Chimps did not do that."

"I don't think they care."

Defoe could not fathom that attitude. He could understand killing the Bug Warriors. You had to do that. Bugs could not be reasoned with. Given orders to shoot, they would keep firing until they ran out of ammunition, then go down swinging the empty weapon. It took a cannon shell to convince them to cease fire. But Chimps were different. Chimps were, well — Chimps. Sure they could be dangerous; more so than Defoe had ever imagined. But they were not near as deadly as *Homo sapiens*. "Man the wise" had a history of mass slaughter that stretched back over a thousand millennia and hundreds of light-years.

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"That's stupid," he told the SuperCat. "I was *at* Subsolar Station. I'm the sole human survivor."

Rowlf replied with a toothy grin, "Congratulations." He had his share of human genes, mixed with those of old-time carnivores. "Maybe the Militia will give you a medal."

"What are Settlers even doing here?"

"They are taking over Shangtu. We just came to get you out."

Thank Elvis for that. Shangtu could look forward to hard times. There were no more than a handful of folks aboard Shangtu pagoda that the new owners considered "really" human. And this SuperChimp massacre would set the tone for their dealings with Thals, clones, greenies, and other "bioconstructs." He shook his head. "Let's get to the landing zone." And Llenor.

The main landing deck jutted out from the lowest level of the pagoda. Llenor's roc lay on the pad, turned into an untidy pile of feathers by the fall. A hovership waited to take them to the LZ, surrounded by more Militia with guns leveled.

Defoe's heart sank. They had Llenor. Her green sleeveless jacket and harlequin flight suit stood out among the gray Militia uniforms. Her wings had been stripped off, and her hands were cuffed behind her back. They had covered her head with an isolation helmet, keeping her from sending or receiving signals.

An argument ensued. The Militia meant to keep Llenor, and wanted their man as well. Rowlf said he did not care about the local female — meaning Llenor — but he was not giving up his prisoner until his team was safely aboard the armored hovership. A minimum precaution in the face of angry Militia, who hated SuperCats as much as they hated Chimps and greenies — maybe even more. Defoe heard the warning snicker of safeties going off.

Seeing the conquerors of Shangtu about to shoot it out right there on the main landing pad, he seized Rowlf's furry arm, "Let me talk."

"Talk all you like," the SuperCat snarled. "But I am not giving up this man until we are aboard the hovership."

Fair enough. Defoe turned to face the Militia Captain. She was black-skinned with a pearl stud in her nose and dreadlocks hanging below her helmet. "Your man is under arrest for murder."

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"Murder?" The Militia woman looked dumfounded.

"He killed two people back up there on the pagoda."

"That's right," Rowlf snarled. "You can shoot Chimps, but not greenies."

Defoe wished the SuperCat would butt out. He had just blown half their case. The Militia would hardly call killing a couple of greenies murder, not with SuperCats for witnesses.

"This is a military operation," the Militia Captain protested — figuring that excused random deaths among defenseless bystanders.

"Right. And your man will face a military court aboard the *Medusa*."

"Who are you to decide this?" the woman demanded.

"Daniel Defoe, pilot first class, assigned to *Medusa*."

The Militia Captain's resolve crumbled. Standing up to furry fang-toothed mutants was one thing. Trying to take a prisoner away from a *Medusa* officer was entirely different. The Settlers needed the *Medusa*. She was the closest thing to a warship insystem — their prime backup on a planet teaming with objectionable types. Without the merchant cruiser, and her arsenal of anti-matter warheads, the colonists were no better than a bunch of gun-armed greenies.

Seeing the Militia woman's hesitation, Defoe swiftly offered her an out, "How about a prisoner exchange?"

"What do you mean?" she sounded suspicious.

"I will turn your man over to you, to be held aboard the *Cape Colony* until a military court can be convened, if you give me the woman you have to be held aboard the *Medusa*." Defoe did not much care what happened to the murderous young Settler, so long as he got Llenor.

"Held for what?" asked the Militia Captain. "She is a convicted criminal — her sentence just needs to be carried out."

"So you say. But she is also part of an outlaw gang that kidnapped me. She needs to face a military court."

He could see the Militia woman's mental programming sorting options. She much preferred to solve the dilemma by gunning down the SuperCats and taking both prisoners back to *Cape Colony*. Defoe's offer came a distant second. But a point blank gun battle is a chancy exercise. While turning Llenor over to a military court was practically her duty — and way better than seeing one of her men dragged offplanet by a gang of armed mutants.

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"Agreed." She ordered her people to part ranks. They made the trade at the hovership hatch, with Rowlf's squad covering the exchange from inside. Llenor was hauled aboard, and the armored hatch slammed shut. They were off.

"Shit, that was close." Defoe shook with relief, barely believing they were free.

Rowlf slid his assault rife safety back on. "You handled that enraged female admirably."

My specialty, Defoe thought. "Why in the world are you working with them? They would cut you down in a nanosecond. And now they have got Shangtu. That's absurd!"

Rowlf shrugged, "That's orders." Marine commanders could not be blamed for policy blunders, they merely carried them out.

"Damn." Defoe was happier than ever to be a non-combatant. He looked over at Llenor. "Then I order you to take off her cuffs and helmet."

"How?" Rowlf looked quizzical. "The code keys are with that Militia female on the landing pad."

Right. Realizing he had screwed up once again, Defoe slumped down in the seat alongside Llenor. At least she was alive. Though right now she could neither hear nor see what was happening around her. A blessing given the circumstances.

Reaching over, he took one of her bound hands in his. She started, then relaxed. Their fingers interlaced. Did she even know it was him? Probably. She had that trusting sense about things, the sure feeling that Elvis would somehow provide. Defoe hoped the King had a plan. It would take supernatural luck to get her out of this. They held hands all the way to the LZ. Then onto the shuttle, and into orbit.

When the shuttle docked with *Medusa*, Defoe went to an immediate face-to-face with his skipper. She was a slim, black-haired, no-nonsense CO, with luminous almond eyes, able to command a merchant cruiser or sit on an admiralty court. That was no coincidence. Defoe was *Medusa*'s chief pilot. Captain Tiffany Suzuki's main job was to hold the balance of power in Prospero system. The colonists aboard *Cape Colony* would more than double Ariel's human population. Already tension ran high between

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incoming Settlers and the original indigenous human population — not to mention the Thals, Chimps, Bugs, etc.

It was Suzuki's job to hold the ring. *Medusa*, with her orbit-to-surface missiles and anti-matter warheads, was meant to overawe any possible opposition. To see the colonists planted more or less peacefully on Ariel. Defoe was glad not to have that job. A single trip to the surface convinced him that nothing about the process would be peaceful. That faint hope was gone. A null program. Worse was bound to come.

He made his report as coherently as he could, with two major omissions. He made no mention of virtual visits to Graceland, and communing with Elvis, Priscilla, etc. Defoe wanted to preserve some credibility with his boss. And he said nothing about any personal feelings for Llenor. His pitch had to be untainted by any touch of love or insanity.

Which left him relying heavily on coincidence, and Llenor's native nobility. Captain Suzuki was at best partly convinced. "This wanted felon just happened to fly by? And seeing you in trouble she swooped you up, risking her own freedom to take you to Shangtu?"

"But she is not a felon," Defoe protested. "That's the point."

"So you say."

"Her actions speak for her."

Suzuki looked hard at him. Did she suspect she was talking to a man in love? Hopefully not. His CO shrugged, "Let's call on *Cape Colony*."

She hologrammed them aboard the colony ship. Even virtual visits to *Cape Colony* made Defoe uneasy. She was not a lucky ship. Infamously unlucky, in fact. *Cape Colony* had the misfortune to make first official contact with the Bugs. Headed for the Deneb Kaitos with a load of colonists from Tau Ceti, she had been hijacked by Eridani slavers. The slavers had already been taken over by the Bugs, who proceeded to weed through the captive colonists, killing all the males and any women over reproductive age. None of the killings were out of malice. Bugs were not capable of disliking humans — reserving their hatred for Bugs from other hives. They just did not see why humans needed two sexes and non-breeders. Eventually the Bugs were brought to heel, but not before giving *Cape Colony* a very bad name.

Otherwise she was a normal high-g colony ship, a great gravity drive starship the size and shape of a small moon, stuffed with colonists and

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equipment, set to double Ariel's human population as soon as room could be made below.

The virtual conference with the colonial leaders was a bust. They might as well be talking to Bugs. The Settler leaders knew all about Llenor. If Medusa did not immediately court-martial her on kidnapping charges, they should hand her over for execution.

Captain Suzuki tried to explain that they were seeking something more like a review, with a chance for a pardon, or a commuted sentence.

Impossible. The best they could offer was to retry her, noting she had already lost a virtual appeal to the high court on Mt. Zion. The colonists were more concerned with laying hands on Amanda — for jail break, hijacking, and going AWOL. Warrants were also out for Evie, Lilith, and Lucifer, all listed as accomplices. And for Marilyn, who had broken a valid brothel contract. (Defoe was amazed not to see Elvis and Priscilla on the list.) Did he have any idea where the *Princess Lisa-Marie* had been headed? They could not fathom why Defoe was reluctant to turn in people who saved his life.

Luckily he was only aboard in 3V. Otherwise he would never have gotten off *Cape Colony*. But it was hard to lay hands on a holo.

He and Suzuki winked back aboard *Medusa*. Defoe grimaced, "That was an unpleasant waste of time. Those fools are utterly out of it. Not even in near orbit. A new trial from the same Settler courts. What a farce."

His Captain agreed. "Why put her through the agony? Better to just fry her ourselves. Dump her out over Dayside, and be done with it."

Defoe stared at her. "You're all heart."

"Comes with the job," Suzuki assured him.

"Doesn't anyone in the Home Systems see the senselessness of sending gun-toting Humanists to a world full of folks they hate?"

Suzuki shook her head. "Nobody *sent* them. They wanted to come here. Everyone aboard the *Cape Colony* is an enthusiastic volunteer."

"Then why don't Home System authorities try to stop them?"

Suzuki shrugged, "I suppose they find them as obnoxious as we do."

"Shit." There was nothing like a sympathetic talk with the Settlers for instilling mad helpless rage. Defoe kept thinking about Llenor, alone in the brig. They had taken off the helmet and cuffs, but she was still locked in a signal-proof cell waiting to die for something she did not do.

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While that young colonist who murdered the hermaphrodite and serving girl was probably relaxing in his cabin, facing at worst a reprimand. Or maybe a good conduct citation.

Defoe started pacing the command deck. "We have to do something."

"Like what?" Captain Suzuki followed him with her eyes.

"Stop them ourselves," he suggested.

"How?"

"We have the power. This ship is armed to the molars with warheads, smart bombs, Osiris missiles, toothy marines..."

"It does not work that way," Suzuki patiently explained. "Our job is to make sure Ariel is settled, not to see justice done. That's up to the inhabitants."

"But Ariel is already settled." By clones, Chimps, Thals, greenies, and whatnot.

"Sparsely inhabited, by whoever or whatever happened to be at hand. These people are as much a part of a transition ecology as the giant trees and flying megafauna. Ariel's biosphere is expanding, the surface will someday be habitable; and Settlers already have the votes to elect any government they want. *Cape Colony* is hardly the end of it. More ships are on the way."

"Yeah," Defoe agreed. "But what would Elvis say?"

"Elvis?" Suzuki laughed. "Don't try to tell me you're a Believer now."

"Not really." He stopped pacing and stared at her. "But we have to take some responsibility. The human race has to be more than an ingenious means of spreading intestinal bacteria to the stars."

Suzuki sighed. "You're taking this too hard."

Defoe nodded. He was taking it damn hard. Llenor was going to die for crimes he was a thousand percent sure she did not do. People who put themselves on the line to help him would be hunted down for their pains. And the slaughter he had seen at Shangtu was set to spread throughout the planet. It made him want to scream.

"You've been through a lot," Suzuki suggested.

No argument there.

"Look, I'll hold onto Llenor as long as I can," she suggested. "Maybe go through the motions of a court martial. Meanwhile, take some R and

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R. Use the gig to go to Pair-a-Dice. Come back when you feel more yourself."

He nodded. That sounded semi-reasonable, but at best it was a stall. Suzuki would eventually turn Llenor over to the Settlers. He could see it in her face.

"And one more thing..."

"What's that?"

"Stay off the religious channel. Captain's orders. That's an electronic sham put over on the faithful. A computer-generated religion, with hologram deities and a simulated hereafter."

"Right." Nothing like being mothered by his Captain. "But tell me something. How did you know I would be at Shangtu?"

Suzuki shrugged, "That was strange. The Militia started planning to hit Shangtu as soon as they lost Subsolar Station — to get a permanent foothold on the plateau. Then we got a tip telling us to look for you in the house of Ro Dae Ho. It came in scrambled using our own codes, and had everything, time, date, even your private ID prefix. We thought it had to be from you. The attack was adjusted accordingly."

Strange? Maybe. Extra weird was more like it. Who could have made that call? He certainly hadn't.

Captain Suzuki arched an eyebrow, "Any explanation?"

"Someone's looking out for me." Defoe left the cabin, and then the ship.

Pair-a-Dice did not make him feel a whit better. The sprawling pleasure island and yacht harbor occupied a geosync point attached to Freeport by the Pair-a-Dice beanstalk. Empty space had been turned into a freeform collection of bars, 3V brothels, Feelie palaces and gambling arcades, serving no socially redeeming purpose except to scramble unsuspecting neurons.

Defoe stayed resolutely away from the real stuff, inhabiting the most honky-tonk holo bars, with 3V effects too shoddy to be taken seriously. The last thing he wanted was to end up spilling his guts to some sympathetic whore. Some lost and likeable girl who would agree that life was totally rotten, but if he could just find it in his heart to fuck her and forget Llenor he would feel lots better. Instead he ended up at Any Way You Want It. The autobar served home-brewed bourbon, and hologram hookers took the customers into chat rooms for ultrasafe sex — with

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everything from orchestrated accompaniment to 3V barnyard animals. Just the sort of absolute seediness Defoe desperately needed.

He had ordered his umpteenth bourbon when an especially lovely holo flicked into being beside him. Turning to shoo her away, he tried to tell her he was busy maintaining his blood alcohol. But before the sentence got half out he stopped, staring at the holo.

It was Amanda. She was not wearing her powder blue uniform or machine pistol — just some strategically placed sequins. But there was no mistaking that angelic face. She nodded toward the chat rooms, "We need to talk."

Defoe found an empty cubical, sealed the door, and sat down on the futon without bothering to remove the plastic cover. "Sober yourself up," she told him.

Chat rooms came equipped with medikits, just in case. He strapped one on, setting it for detox. The bourbon melted away. Instead of being drunk, he was just miserable.

"I warned you," she reminded him.

"But it was not my fault." That sounded horribly hollow.

"Right. Otherwise you would be seeing me in person. Now what are you going to *do* about it?"

"What can I do?"

"Getting falling down drunk won't help." She shook her blonde head. "Look, I had a lover named Kia. We were crazy about each other. So much in love they had to kill one of us to keep us apart. Don't let that happen to you."

"How can I stop it?"

"Start by going to Graceland. No better place to take your troubles than straight to the King."

Amanda looked dead serious, though she had never seemed the religious type.

There were Graceland Shrines all over Human Space, some small and shabby, others huge and garish. Defoe had even seen the original one on Old Earth, still preserved at the heart of Greater Memphis. The Pair-a-Dice shrine looked nothing like that stone and brick mansion under glass. Designed to blend with the local decor, the Pair-a-Dice shrine was a glittering hologram copy of the legendary Las Vegas Hilton, pulsing to the beat of "Heartbreak Hotel."

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Worshipers checked in through a plush antique lobby, served by old-fashioned elevators. Defoe was ushered straight up to the Imperial Suite. The Las Vegas strip shone in towering neon through wraparound windows. Elvis was there, in white and gold regalia, rings sparkling on his fingers. With him was preacher Rick, wearing his suit-of-lights.

Elvis grinned, "Good ta see ya, son. Ready to go into action?"

"Doing what?" Defoe felt absurdly foolish, asking advice from a holo — but this is what it had come to.

"Doing what's right," Elvis replied. "You've lost the most precious thing on the planet..."

"We're not on a planet," Defoe pointed out. They were in a hologram hotel on a geosync station, connected to Ariel by thousands of klicks of beanstalk.

"Don't matter. You've lost a loving woman. Ain't nothin' in the whole cosmos as important as that. Believe me, the King knows what that's like. People like ta pretend otherwise, but it's women that make the galaxy go round. That's why you have to revere and respect 'em. And be ready to do right by 'em. Llenor is some special woman. You know that, don't you?"

Defoe said he did.

"So, are you set to do right?"

"How?"

"By going and getting her."

"And then what?" Even if he could get Llenor out of the *Medusa*'s brig, she would still be wanted under Settler Law. Every station, every beanstalk, every ship headed outsystem would be closed to them. They would have nowhere to go, with the Militia at their heels. Even Suzuki would be honor-bound to help track them down.

Brother Rick chuckled. "I know it seems like the whole universe is against you. But remember — you got the King in your corner."

Fine. Easy for him to say. He was a holo in a make-believe hotel. Defoe could not simply escape to some virtual neverland.

"That's the truth," Elvis assured him. "Get Llenor, and everything will turn out right."

"She's in a locked cell."

Elvis smirked. "Rick will be with you. Won't you, Rick?" His step-brother nodded. "And we got gigarams of memory backing us. What's a

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few little door locks? C'mon, son, get your show on the road."

Utter madness. But in minutes Defoe was back aboard the gig, headed for *Medusa*. Rick was with him, ready for action, having exchanged his suit-of-lights for jeans and an *Elvis* windbreaker. He grinned at Defoe. "Nervous?"

Defoe nodded. It was halfway through the midwatch. Things aboard ship should be quiet. But...

"Don't sweat it," Rick advised. "Nobody will see me but you. As soon as you get to your cabin, key into your terminal. I'll take it from there."

He nodded again. Defoe did not think they would have much trouble breaking into the brig. The locks were keyed to keep prisoners in, not to keep ship's officers out. It was what would happen afterward that had him worried.

"Look." Rick warmed to his sermon. "I know it ain't easy being touched by the King. Look at me. I lost my dad — my *real* dad. Everyone knows I'm Elvis's step-brother. But that was not good enough for Elvis. He made me his brother. His dad became my dad. An' when he took me on the road as a teenager, I nearly lost my mom too. Sometimes you just have to do what's right, and say to hell with the rest."

Defoe did not reply. He was blowing his bridges behind him. Giving up everything. And for what?

A marine guard met him at the lock, muscles rippling beneath her fur. The saber-toothed female purred happily, "Been having fun?" She was being polite; SuperCats did not give a thin damn what *Homo sapiens* did off-duty.

"Just the usual." Defoe doubted she could recognize a guilty look. Biosensors would show he was hiding something. But anyone who came back from Pair-a-Dice without something to be ashamed of had thoroughly wasted his R and R.

He went to his cabin, doused the lights, and set the door to "Do not disturb." As if he meant to sleep it off. Pulling his personal terminal over to the bed, he opened it to a Pair-a-Dice channel. A silent message flashed onscreen, "Shake, Rattle, and Roll."

Defoe eased out the door. Hiding in his flight suit was the stinger Ro Dae Ho had given to Llenor — and Rowlf had given to him. Rick met him halfway to the brig. "Set the stinger for stun. There's one guard, and the lock's coded to take your thumb print."

Defoe nodded, nervously palming the stinger in his left hand.

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A SuperCat lounged by the brig lock. "What goes, human?"

"Come to take the prisoner to a face-to-face interrogation. Here's my authorization." Holding out a memory card with his right hand, to get the saber-tooth's attention, he triggered the stinger with his left.

A heat-seeking hornet homed in on the surprised SuperCat, knocking him out before he could snarl a complaint.

Slinging the sleeping saber-tooth over his shoulder, Defoe thumbed the lock. Llenor was in the first cell. There were no other prisoners — until now *Medusa* had been a very law abiding ship. He thumbed the cell lock, and the door dilated.

She shot him a very surprised look. He must have been a sight — showing up at her cell door with a *Homo smilodon* slumped over his shoulder, accompanied by a grinning archangel in blue jeans and an Elvis jacket. But she had sense enough not to shout about it, helping him lay the SuperCat down on her bed-pad.

Then he took her hand. Neither dared speak. Who knew what might set off an alarm? But they could kiss. And did. Not a lingering first kiss, like the last one. This one was quick and delicious. Making Defoe wish they had not wasted all that time talking aboard the *Lisa-Marie.* Rick discreetly disappeared.

Giving a squeeze that meant, "Follow me," he led Llenor out of the brig, sealing the doors behind them, headed for the control deck. Getting Llenor sprung was the easy part — now they badly needed somewhere to run to. Going back to the gig was pointless; the little low-g runabout could not take them far enough. *Medusa* could home in on the gig's emissions, letting Suzuki either hunt them down or cancel his contract with an anti-matter warhead. Defoe's sole choice was to take over the ship.

Signaling Llenor to stand out of sight, he thumbed the control deck lock. The bridge door dilated. The watch officer, a comtech named Ducey, looked up and smiled. He never got a chance to say hello. Defoe fired as he stepped in, and Ducey slumped in his seat. Llenor scooted through the door, sealing the lock behind her.

Defoe immediately disengaged the autopilot, taking over control. He had to give the crew no time to react. Hitting the manual override on DAMAGE CONTROL, he ordered the keel companionway to decompress. Alarms dopplered through the *Medusa.* Defoe sounded GENERAL QUARTERS, sending everyone scrambling to their action stations. But

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with the keel companionway decompressed, Suzuki and the control crew would have to suit up to get to the bridge.

Anxious calls came in, which he studiously ignored, using the anti-virus defenses to seal off communications — isolating the various action stations, as if they were infected by an outside attack. All orders now had to come from the command deck.

He gave everyone a couple more seconds to suit up and get to their stations, then he started jettisoning sections of the ship. All action stations doubled as escape pods, and in an emergency could be ejected into orbit. So far as Defoe could see, this qualified as a dire emergency.

Llenor helped him strap the sleeping Ducey into one of the bridge escape pods. Then Defoe ejected him as well, emptying the ship. Leaving them alone, in a much reduced *Medusa*. The armed merchant cruiser had been stripped down to her command deck, main engines, anti-matter tanks, and armory, with its stock of Osiris missiles. For the moment at least, Defoe had complete command of the most powerful fighting machine insystem. Not a responsibility he craved.

"Well done, son." Elvis sat in the command couch, which was tilted back and turned to face the cabin, an electric guitar cradled in his lap. He looked almighty pleased. "The King himself could not have done it more neatly."

Defoe glared at the 3V intrusion. "Don't be so modest. This is what you wanted. What you aimed at all along." He felt silly arguing with a holo.

"Close enough," Elvis admitted.

Defoe snorted. He had been had. Outwitted by a brainless holo, backed by gigarams of computing capacity. Defoe cursed whoever first taught computers to play chess. He turned to look at Llenor, who had her green eyes fixed on Elvis. "How much of this were you in on?"

She tore her gaze off the King, asking, "What do you mean?"

Defoe studied her innocent-looking face, with its tattooed list of heinous crimes. Could she have been conning him too? Defoe hated to believe it. He could still taste her latest kiss, but did not know how much to trust her. "You really don't know?"

She shook her head, looking genuinely mystified.

Defoe waved at Elvis lounging in the command couch, tuning his virtual guitar. "He put us here."

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"Hey," Elvis looked up from the guitar. "You did most of this yourself. A damn good job too. The King's proud of you."

Llenor smiled quizzically, "Of course he did. He's the King."

Right. Defoe sighed. She still earnestly meant to make a Believer out of him. "I mean he planned all this from the moment I touched down on the plateau — maybe even before. The Comnet crash. Chimps going berserk. The chase. You saving me. Our trip to Shangtu. The Militia attack. Your capture. My saving you..."

"Hold on," Elvis objected, "the Militia made that attack on their own. I've got no hold on them. And those Chimps were only supposed to spook you."

"They did that," Defoe admitted.

"But that massacre was their notion. You can't always tell what an ape will do. Did I ever tell you about Scatter? He was just your normal ape, no human genes, but he used to eat with a fork. Drinkin' bourbon at the table. One time..."

Defoe cut the story short. "But you did tell Suzuki that I would be at the House of Ro Dae Ho. You set up Llenor, getting her arrested, and taken aboard ship, forcing me to come after her."

"I don't remember anyone twisting your arm." Elvis turned to Llenor, looking genuinely contrite. Cockiness vanished, replaced by country boy sincerity. "Miss Llenor, I am truly sorry for what you were put through to get here. If there were any other way, believe me, we would have done it differently."

Defoe fumed. He was seeing the King's legendary style with women, sincere, attentive, respectful, and immensely successful.

It certainly worked with Llenor. She forgave Elvis at once. "We're here. We have the ship. That's what matters." Then she turned to Defoe, taking his hand, pulling him to her. The King might be irresistible, but he was still only a hologram. Llenor wanted the real thing.

Her arm went around Defoe's waist, pressing her body against his. For all her guileless youth, she was a ship's captain, accustomed to getting what she wanted. She spoke softly and sincerely, "I did not plan any of this — but I'm glad it happened. This ship has been our greatest fear, hanging overhead, loaded with death."

"A real sword of Damocles." Elvis grinned.

Defoe ignored him, completely taken by the woman in his arms. They

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were right. *Medusa* and her anti-matter arsenal had become a sword hanging over everyone. Suzuki herself said the ship would never be used to bring justice, just to see that people obeyed. Now he had that power in his hands. What should he do with it? Bomb the Militia bases? Threaten to blow up *Cape Colony*? Unthinkable. He did not want such power. No one should have it. He stared at Llenor. "So now what?"

She looked to Elvis.

The King struck a chord on his guitar, then pretended to adjust the tuning. "I think you know what we need to do."

She looked back at Defoe. "Take her down."

"Crash her?" *Medusa* was not made to enter atmosphere.

Looking up, Elvis agreed, "Only way to level the playing field. So long as this ship hangs over the planet, no one below gets a fair shake."

Defoe had been thinking more along the lines of heading outsystem at as near to light speed as they could go. But where would they head in a hijacked starship? Not for the bright lights of civilization. They'd have to go deeper into the Outback, looking to lose themselves in some untamed system.

Llenor saw no need for that. Ariel was as untamed and Outback as they come. And what better place to get lost than on her home planet? He stared at her. Damn. He did not mean to be a hero. Much less a martyr. Defoe did not like giving up everything for folks he did not know, and was never likely to meet. But did he have any choice?

He let go of Llenor. Whatever happened, he did not want to blame it on her, even subconsciously. Llenor was already overburdened with other people's mistakes. He settled into the co-pilot's couch, thinking how much he had wanted a ship of his own. Now he had one.

Elvis looked over from the command couch, leaning on his guitar. "Must be a rush."

"What?"

"Flying a ship like this."

Defoe smiled. "Makes everything else seem to be standing still." A high-g starship literally slowed down the universe. No one could ever catch him. In a matter of months ship-time he could be at the fringes of the galaxy, headed for Andromeda, or the Magellanic Clouds. But that meant eternal exile. Among beings that made SuperChimps seem like kissing cousins.

He reached out and took the controls. "Of course, near light-speeds

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don't muss your hair." *Medusa* could take you halfway across the cosmos in living room comfort. "The only way to get a feeling of speed is to aim her at something big, then open the throttle."

"Like a planet." Elvis grinned.

Like Ariel. He looked at Llenor. She came over to sit on the arm of the command couch, putting her hand on his shoulder. Defoe engaged the gravity drive, throwing *Medusa* out of orbit, sending them plunging toward the planet.

"What is your point of impact?" Llenor asked quietly, showing a pilot's professional interest.

Defoe had plenty of planet to pick from. All of Darkside was virtually uninhabited. Even on Dayside, inhabited points were few and far between. Wherever they hit, it would be a huge bang. The missile warheads were bad enough, but the ship's own anti-matter tanks were even more explosive. It would be like an asteroid impact.

He gave her coordinates for a point beyond the Great Reach, on the far side of the Subsolar Plateau halfway to the Twilight Belt. She nodded. "Good choice."

"The nearest populated point will be the Dayside Archipelago, a quarter of the planet away. They should be safe enough." Unlike an asteroid impact, most of the energy from anti-matter explosion would be released as hard radiation, deflected into space. He sat back to watch Ariel's white image grow larger in the screens, blanking out the stars.

Elvis started strumming his guitar, plunking out the most mournful, hillbilly, Bug hollow version of "My Darlin' Clementine:"

> "Inn-ahh Can-yun,
> Inn-ahh Cavv-ern,
> Ex-cav-vate-in' for ah mine,
> Dwell-t ah Mi-ner
> For-tee-nine-er
> An' his daugh-ah-t-er
> Clemm-enn-tine..."

Their fall became a plummet. *Medusa* hit the first tenuous layers of atmosphere and corona flared up to fill the screens. Elvis raised the beat,

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rapping out the chorus in time to the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:

"Oh-my-Darlin'
Oh-my-Darlin'
Oh-my-Darlin'
Clem-en-tine,
Thou-art-lost-and-gone-forever,
Dread-ful-sorrow-Clem-en-tine..."

Incandescent air surrounded the ship, cutting off all incoming signals. The King flickered and vanished. Communications blackout. Elvis had left the building.

Defoe and Llenor were alone in the falling starship. She reached down to take his hand, as the cabin began to bounce and vibrate around them. Soon pieces would start to fly off.

He looked up at her, "Time we left too." He had been holding off until the last nanosecond, making sure that nothing would pull the spacecraft out of her dive.

Unsealing an escape pod, they crawled inside. The pod was not really built for two — but they were not about to be separated. Being bigger, Defoe wedged himself into the seat. Llenor climbed in onto his lap, sealing the hatch behind her. He had to reach around her to get at the armrest controls.

Then he waited. Exiting the ship had to be neatly timed. If he ejected too soon, there was a chance he could be tracked. *Cape Colony* was below the horizon, and Pair-a-Dice beanstalk was on the wrong side of the planet — but someone might still be looking down from orbit. He meant to cover his escape by waiting until the ship started to break and burn.

Of course if he waited too long, he and Llenor would be crushed and fried.

He had to make this delicate decision with Llenor sitting on his lap. It was the most intimate moment they had ever shared — crammed together into a capsule not meant for two. Defoe struggled to concentrate on the capsule, which was bouncing about as *Medusa* began to break up. Now or never. He hit pod-eject, and they went flying out of the wreck.

Great. Though that was just half of it. To be really safe, they had to eject from the pod as well. The pod slowing for a soft landing would stand

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out like a signal flare amid the swiftly falling wreckage. A sure sign someone was inside, riding the pod down. But the two of them — using a chute pack — would be radar invisible, barely leaving a trace.

The pod stabilized, no longer bounced about by the disintegrating ship. As he snapped the chute pack harness to his flight suit, Defoe realized that even though the pod had righted itself, Llenor was still shaking. With her face turned away, it was hard to tell if she was frightened, sobbing, or going into shock.

Shit. What should he do? She had been through enough to drive the average person schizo. And now he was getting ready to blow them both out of the falling capsule. What if she panicked and could not hold on?

She twisted about to look at him. Defoe saw she was giggling. Her giggle turned into a laugh. Leaning closer, she stopped long enough to whisper, "Love me tender."

"I'll try," he told her. "Now hold tight." She grabbed his flight suit. Putting his arms around her, he triggered the release, hurtling them out of the capsule and into the screaming slipstream.

Wham. The howling rush of air hit like a wall, nearly ripping Llenor out of his arms. Then they were falling free.

He pulled the chute release. Another thump, and they were floating down, using the chute lines to head for the Subsolar Plateau. Far over the horizon, somewhere on the black, burning moonscape beneath the cloud plain, a mushroom cloud rose above *Medusa*'s impact point.

Red-blonde sand rushed up to meet them. They hit, and Llenor bounced free. Defoe rolled on impact, staying loose, trying not to break anything vital. Picking himself up, he wiped grit out of his mouth, thinking, "This is where I came in."

Llenor came over and helped him out of his chute harness. Then they used the folding shovel from the survival pack to bury their chute. Llenor carefully divided the contents of the survival pack between them, making sure he was not carrying more than her. Defoe realized he was going to have to get used to having her next to him, making decisions, doing things for him that he had always done for himself.

Setting off together under the near-noon sun, they headed for the pockets of habitation along the plateau edge. Before they got even halfway, *Princess Lisa-Marie* nosed over the horizon, looking to pick up another couple of outcasts.

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CURIOSITIES

JULIUS LEVALLON, BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

IMAGINE you meet someone who stimulates in you a memory of past lives. Not just a hundred years ago, or a thousand, or even ancient Egypt. But hundreds of thousands of years ago, maybe more, maybe not even on this planet. And just imagine that the person who does all this shared some of those lives with you, right back to the very start. That's what happens when John Mason meets Julius LeVallon in the novel of that name by Algernon Blackwood.

Blackwood's better remembered for such powerful short stories as "The Willows" and "The Wendigo" and his novels, out of print for far too long, are forgotten. But you won't get one more powerful and with such a tremendous climax as *Julius LeVallon*, published in 1916.

LeVallon reminds Mason of a time eons ago, which he calls the Temple Days, when the two of them, and a girl, conducted a forbidden experiment that failed. But it had released the elemental powers of Wind and Fire which remained untethered. Over the eons LeVallon had tried to channel those powers back to their domain but had always failed because the channel — the girl — was not present. Now, at last, after all these millennia, the three spirits are together again and LeVallon must face the ultimate challenge. Does he succeed? That's the climax of the book. Let me just say that Blackwood set out originally to write a book about a child whose body was host to the Nature elements of Wind and Fire. That child is the subject of the sequel, *The Bright Messenger*, but that's another story.

— Mike Ashley

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